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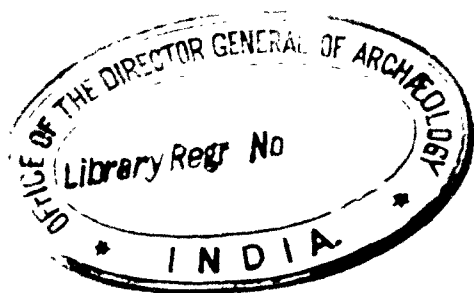
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The Madrasa of Shāh Husayn, Isfāhān

FROM MOSCOW TO THE PERSIAN GULF

BEING THE JOURNAL OF A
DISENCHANTED TRAVELLER
IN TURKESTAN AND PERSIA

BY

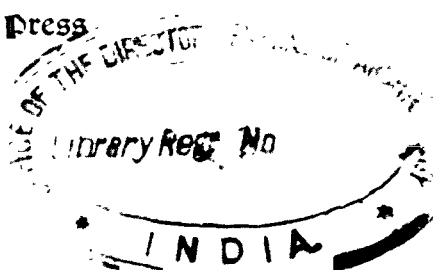
BENJAMIN BURGESS MOORE

"HE THAT INCREASETH KNOWLEDGE INCREASETH SORROW"

WITH 160 ILLUSTRATIONS AND A MAP

G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS
NEW YORK AND LONDON
The Knickerbocker Press

1915



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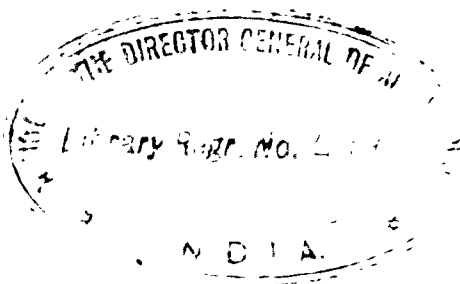
BY

BENJAMIN BURGESS MOORE

The Knickerbocker Press, New York

TO
MY MOTHER

"The path of a good woman is indeed strewn with flowers; but they rise behind her steps, not before them."



“It was the unstinted, and instructed, and experienced hospitality of the English . . . that made my visit profitable and enjoyable.”

COLLIER: *The West in the East.*

FOREWORD

ALL the books I have ever read about Persia, have been more or less rose-coloured; encouraging persons who—like myself—dreamed of how they might one day visit the land of Irān, hallowed by history and by memories of the lovely art it produced in epochs that shall never return. When at last I travelled in Persia, I found it disappointing; nevertheless my journey was so instructive, so diversified by amusing incidents, and offered so much that was curious or picturesque, I would not willingly have foregone it. I have therefore thought that pages whose one aim is sedulously to describe the country as it really is, might have a value of their own—however slight—not possessed even by masterpieces of rhythm and romance such as Loti's *Vers Ispahan*: while stating frankly all that was disagreeable, I have, however, endeavoured to bring out the beauty of many places in Persia, and avoid in my narrative the monotony which so frequently characterized the scenery.

It would be a subject for regret, should anything I have written convey the idea that I consider my unfavourable opinion of Persia and her people definitive even for myself; I have merely noted a

traveller's passing impressions as accurately as possible, not pretending to judge a historic race by the observation of a single visit.

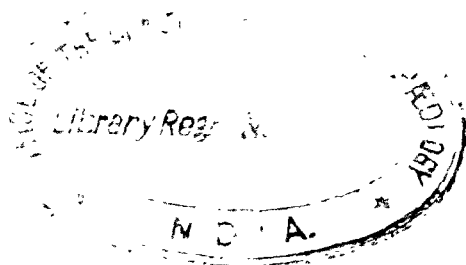
I leave the book in the shape of a journal, believing it to be both a form that has in English greater novelty than that of more ambitious works, and also one permitting a more personal expression.

B. B. M.

NEW YORK,
May, 1915.

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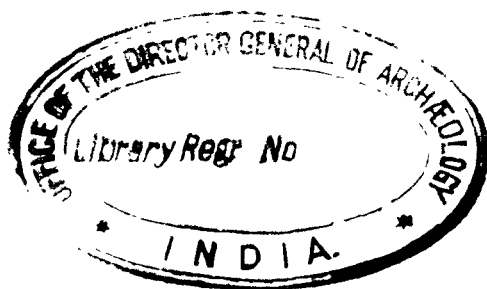
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ERRATA

The author did not have an opportunity of reading the proofs of list of illustrations and the legends beneath the illustrations, and certain errors appear for which he is not responsible.

- P. 6 ff. *for* Moskov *read* Moscow.
- P. 78 *for* Turksmen *read* Turkomen.
- P. 266 ff. *for* Maurüz *read* Nawrüz.
- P. 319 *for* Hlad *read* Head.
- P. 351 *for* Ivan Cyrus *read* I am Cyrus
- P. 362 ff. *for* Nagsh-i-Rustam *read* Naqsh-i-Rustam.
- P. 374 *for* Nagsh-i-Rajab *read* Naqsh-i-Rajab.
- P. 374 *for* Thier *read* Threw.
- P. 403 *for* Reignous Persian dynasty *read* Reigning Persian dynasty.



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I

MOSCOW TO ASKĀBĀD

I

MOSCOW TO ASKĀBĀD

February 8th 1914.

THE train has just left Moscow station, and I am really started on my way to Turkestan and those cities of sonorous name, Samarkand and Bukhārā. Fortunately, I decided to leave on a day when the Compagnie Internationale des Wagons-Lits runs a car, in which it is possible to open the double windows of my sleeping-compartment. Only those who have travelled in Russia in winter can realise the extent of this boon; in Russian carriages belonging to the state, the double windows are hermetically closed and screwed in place, so that no ingenuity suffices to open them so much as a crack; to seal them still more effectually, a strip of heavy green felt is hung across the lower half, the only possible source of ventilation being a tiny vent in the roof. At either end of the car an immense stove, hidden in a closet and filled with logs, blazes day and night. The poor foreigner, not trained to Russian ways from infancy, lies in these breathless ovens with

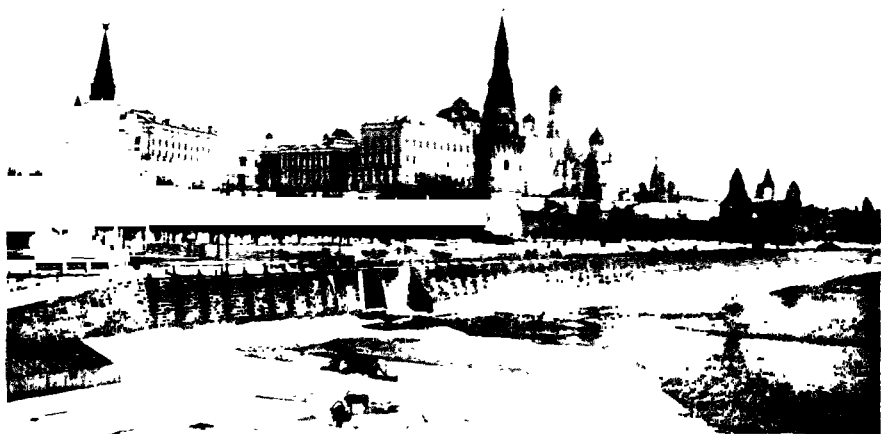
reeling head, panting and perspiring like a stricken dog. Four days of this misery have been spared me by the enlightened windows of the sleeping-car company. My compartment, although small, is a comfortable place in which to pass a hundred hours crossing the plains of Asia. The car is composite, half first, and half second-class carriages; and in the compartment next to me is Saïd, my Algerian valet,—as adroit a servant and as faithful a follower as any man could wish. I can see no difference between his compartment and mine, save the colours of the coverings, and the fact that by paying two supplements, I am able to secure for myself an entire compartment without fear of intrusion by uncouth or uncleanly travellers.

Scarcely an hour has elapsed since we left the Kasan station; yet those features which the word Moscow will hereafter always evoke, have already begun to cohere, offering the inner eye one of those sharply defined images always left by places that have deeply impressed us. It centres about the Kremlin, before which the Krasnaya—or Red—Square stretches like the proscenium of some vast pageant; bounded at one end by that incredible Vasily Blasjenny Church, with its unique and almost monstrous agglomeration of neck-like towers and bulbous domes,—each different from the other, and all striped and patterned with every colour known to man; a building singularly expressive of that fantastic world in which moved and

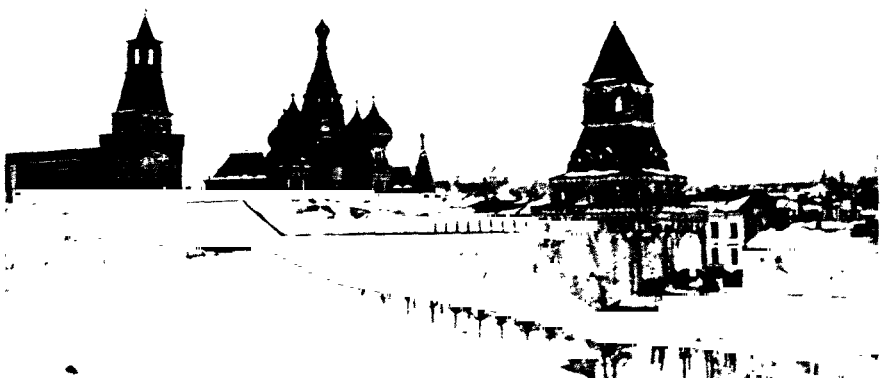
reigned Ivan Grosny, known to us as the Terrible. Along the further side of the square, the great brick walls of the Kremlin stretch away endlessly, crenellated and rose-red; terminating at the angles in round slender turrets with slim spires, and broken at intervals by huge rectangular gateways, surmounted by towering steeples brightly green and crowned with iron eagles. Over these walls peers an indistinguishable confusion of palaces, churches, cloisters, towers, and roofs, on which—as on a sea—a multitude of bulbiform small domes seems to float. Viewed from the bridge over the Moscow, or as it is called in Russian—like the city itself—the Moskva River, the Kremlin rises from the bastioned walls that sweep along the curving stream, in a steep slope covered with buildings fantastically formed. Within, it offers a view, not so much of a fortress as of a theocratic city; where the churches, which all but outnumber the palaces, crowd about little squares whence, over the rosy walls, a glimpse is caught of the gaudy domes of Iyon Grosny's church; or, far away down beside the bending river, of the noble outlines of St. Saviour's Church, built to commemorate the great Napoleon's defeat. The quintessence of the Kremlin lies, however, in a recollection of untold quantities of jewel-work, richly wrought and delicate beyond words to praise, gathered together in dim, almost secret-seeming rooms; and in the impression of those strange cathedrals, subdivided into little spaces,

with a singular aspect of confusion, splendour, and rampant idolatry.

Moscow also evokes long drives at evening-dark, over the snow in little sleighs, to distant fortified white monasteries; where in scantily lighted churches, filled with tiny lamps glimmering before idol-like ikons, priests and deacons, their incredible bass notes booming below the high voices of the boys, sing with curious ceremony nostalgic music, sometimes badly, sometimes very nobly. Above all, it presents to memory a picture of that fantastic monastery, the Troitsko-Sergiyevskaya Lavra, which lies some sixty versts away across the flat and snow-draped country, guarding in its treasury its six hundred and fifty million roubles' worth of churchly jewels. Viewed from the hill-crest, on a day of brilliant sun flashing through the air and sparkling on the endless fields of snow; it stretches before one, an immense mass of buildings, fortified like all old Russian monasteries, and enclosed in high white walls with crenellations, buttressed at each angle by an immense round tower, domed and painted in bright scarlet, with certain forms picked out by white lines. Over these vast outer walls, there rises a quite indescribable confusion of churches and convents, towers, roofs and domes, strange in form, and all painted in bright clear shades of red, blue, green, white, pink, and even lavender, while stars are patterned on those domes not covered with gilt. The colours are light but crude



The Kremlin from the Kamenny Bridge Moscow



The Vasily Blazhenny Church from within the Kremlin

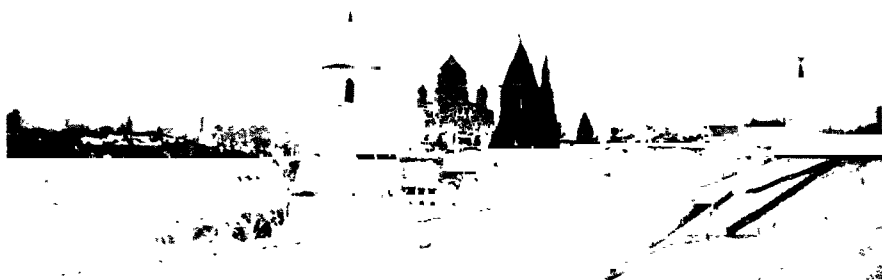
This church was built by Ivan the Terrible, who is said to have had the architect blinded on its completion, in order that nothing like it should ever be built.



Inside the Kremlin, Moskov

The Archangelsky Cathedral and the Ivan Veliky Tower

The broken bell beside the tower was made by order of the Empress Anne, and is the largest in the world



St. Saviour's Church from the Kremlin, Moskov

This church was built to commemorate Napoleon's defeat

and contrasting; the effect is barbaric, yet intensely striking and picturesque; it is in real life one of those strangely splendid scenes with which the settings of the Russian ballet have made us familiar.

Indeed, colour is the distinctive feature of all Russian architecture, of which nothing that describes only the masses can give an idea. Its forms are strange and half oriental, yet would not in themselves produce a deep impression; its materials are poor, being brick and rubble, but are plastered over and then painted with every conceivable shade of clear intense colour. The barbaric combination of colours is disconcerting, and not at all beautiful, according to our æsthetics; yet it is undeniably picturesque and effective, with an acrid beauty of its own not unlike the impression made on classical ears by modern music.

Among striking recollections of "Little Mother" Moscow, perhaps the most indelible is that of its numberless small domes, formed like tapering bulbs, and floating over the city wherever seen. The gilt with which they are covered, if new—as it frequently is—shines like sun-glow even under the sombre light of the grey and lifeless skies so characteristic of a Russian winter; toward evening, in clear weather, they reflect the last rays, flashing and sparkling over the city. But even more fantastic and impressive than the domes they surmount, are the myriads of finial crosses; these are usually not straight and solid, but wrought in

some sort of fligree, with fine points and lace-like ornaments; the whole fastened by spreading wires to the domes, from whose taper points they seem to burst like blossoming stalks from bulbs,—tracing on the sombre sky a net-work not unlike the rigging of a ship . . . Moscovite memories such as these, cross my mind as the wide and steady cars are drawn through the winter dark, toward the plains of Turkestan with their legendary cities.

February 9th

Nothing could be more unlike the bright colours and strange forms of Moscow than the dim and formless view outside the carriage-window this morning. The boundless sky is grey—no, not even grey; it is the mere negation of colour, a pallor seemingly the hue of vacuity; at times, near the horizon, it turns white like the snow and appears alive; but overhead there is only endless and immobile dreariness. The landscape is monotonous and desolate, lacking even the beauty of great expanses of snow; endless undulations stretch away vaguely until earth and sky mingle in a mysterious nebulosity; dun-coloured stubble or ash-brown earth shows through the thin snow; here and there are stretches where weeds, withered and colourless, stand in rows or clumps, whilst at intervals a grey-white mass attracts attention when the snow has gathered deep enough to hide the earth. Sometimes trees grow singly or in

groups, battered and leafless, showing a little mass of intricate boughs faintly outlined against the grey; or else evergreens form dark spots in the landscape, where small woods occasionally draw still darker larger lines. Habitations are visible but rarely and, even then, are nothing more than little cabins of wood, rough and unpainted, in colour a dirty hopeless grey-brown singularly in keeping with the universal dreariness. Once in a long while a sledge passes, laden with straw and drawn by a dull-coloured horse, with men in long black coats following close behind; but generally there is no living thing in sight. Near the stations there are more signs of life: sleighs—with horses harnessed to the shafts by high wooden yokes shaped like a horseshoe—appear, drawing logs slowly, or moving swiftly with only the owner seated on the floor—since they have no seats; a better sort of house is also to be seen, its two storeys painted and ornamented with scroll-work like Swiss chalets; invariably they stand inside an enclosure, where a horse is rolling lazily in the snow, or a few figures are hurrying across.

The only diversity in the scenery occurs where there are miniature valleys, having slopes of some twenty feet up which small evergreens scramble, or else where there is a wood growing near enough to the railway for one to see either the serried rows of pines (deep olive-green darkening to black) or the white stems of small and slender

birches surrounded by a delicate tracery of twigs, which lends a touch of grace to all this desolation. Sometimes I can descry a crow perched on one of those wooden palisades, laid in sections making acute angles one with the other—so as not to fall, and placed in exposed spots to prevent the snow from piling up in huge drifts. These Russian crows are smarter than their brothers who wheel across the skies of western Europe, and are altogether most picturesque and interesting fellows. Their breasts and backs are warm grey—almost dun—and slightly speckled, only the heads, wings, and a kind of bib-like patch under the bill, being shiny black. They are large, fearless, and everywhere quite at their ease. A smaller species of crow is also to be seen quite frequently—all black and more lively, but also more easily frightened, flitting off quickly in real bird-fashion, whereas the larger kind has but little of the unceasing volatility so usual in birds.

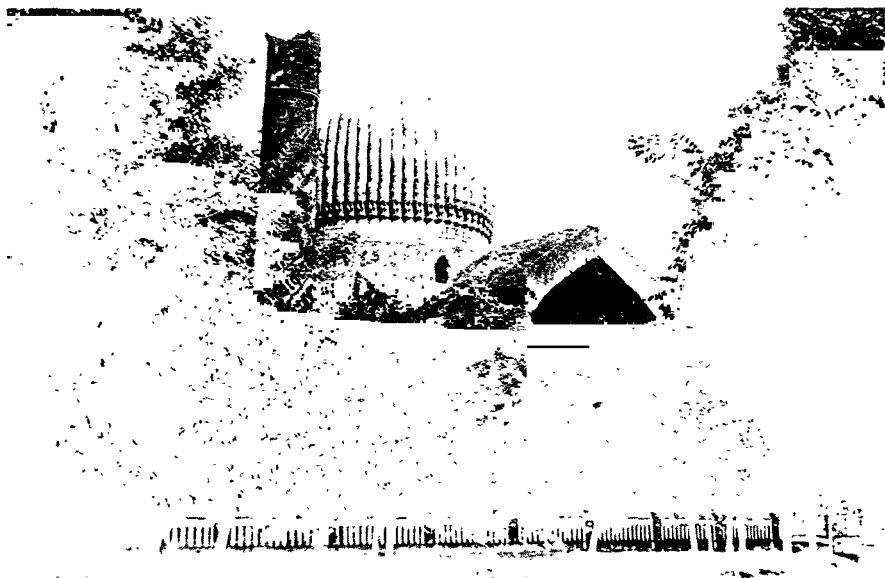
At the stations, the poorest of the peasants have their legs wound in rags laced round with string, and are shod by a sort of a slipper woven with strips of vegetable fibre; these are really nothing more than a sole with a solid strip that covers the toes and stretches back far enough to prevent this primitive foot-gear from coming off. They are dressed in long jackets made of skins with the furry side turned in, and wear big shaggy hats of fur. Those better off are dressed in long black coats with full skirts, like those worn in



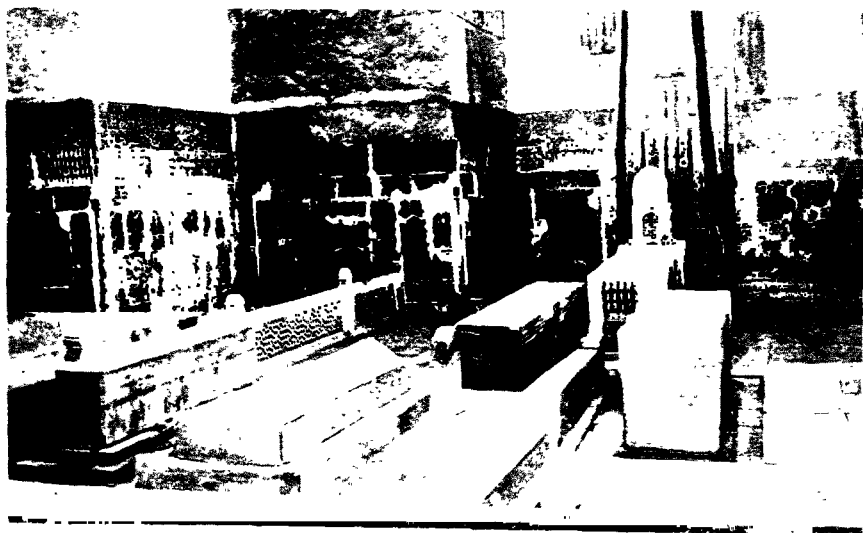
A Typical Church, Moscow



The Troitsco-Sergiyevskaya Lavra near Moscow
Next to the monastery at Kiev, this is the oldest and most famous one in all Russia



The Tomb of Timūr Lang, Samarqand
(The minaret no longer exists)



The Grave of Timūr Lang, Samarqand
Timūr's grave is marked by the black slab)

Moscow, and high boots of blackish felt with soles of the same material. One fellow—somewhat of a dandy—has a pair of these clumsy boots made of light grey felt, decorated with scarlet stitching, closely worked and finished off toward the tops and soles by rough scroll patterns. Only very occasionally a man is rich enough to own a pair of leather boots. At these small stations not a sound is to be heard, save perhaps the distant barking of a dog; silence and sadness seem to weigh on the country, giving to every scene a curious air of resignedness. I do not know if this is a delusion, created by memories of what I have read in Russian literature; but country and people alike do certainly seem weighed down by a quietude that is stupefaction even more than resignation.

Quite frequently the train passes through a little wood of birches. (Repetitions of the word “little” can scarcely be avoided, since everything in view is slight and stunted.) These birches—with their slim white stems, spotted with black and wrapped in a brownish haze, formed by masses of leafless branches too fine for the eye to see separately—do not hide the white snow lying on the earth between their trunks; but here and there smaller trees stand out more boldly against the white—deciduous also, but with dried leaves still clinging to the boughs in patches of buff that wave and quiver against the greys and white of sky and earth. At the present moment we are running

through a coppice of birches—for Russia—of considerable size; they are entirely coated with a glare of ice, so that the straight trunks, while visible from root to topmost twig, are yet surrounded by pearly masses of drooping branchlets that seem a foliage from fairyland. There being no sunlight, these jewelled trees are neither white nor glittering, only a tender grey tracing an intricate design across a veil of clouds. Leafless shrubs, growing between their trunks, are likewise tipped and powdered with ice; while here and there a sturdier tree, on whose duller bark the icy coating is scarcely visible, by its contrast enhances the gracile beauty of the birch. Here the snow lies thickly in a covering of pure white; the whole scene is poetic and suggestive of old-time tales of faëry, making a break in the monotony very welcome even though momentary.

It is now afternoon and we have just reached Sizran, where all the luggage has to be shifted from one train to another. A group of fur-capped porters is lifting an immense iron tube into one of the vans, singing a chanty all the while, quite in the manner of choruses on the stage. Mongolian, almost Chinese types appear for the first time among the people at the station—queer flat faces that make me realise I am really approaching Asia. For a few seconds a glint of sun breaks through the clouds, lighting up the dreary scene with a red-gold glow. When we draw out of the station an hour and a half later, a full moon

ascends the darkling sky behind long wisps of vapour that trail across its glistening disk. Before long, however, clouds veil the moon and all the sky; when the train begins to skirt the Volga, *Matuschka* or Little Mother Volga, I can barely discern, through the fast gathering darkness, an indeterminate stretch of grey and snowy ice where a darker line vaguely marks the further shore. Nothing else is visible, yet the thought that this is the famous Volga is stirring—particularly when the tinkling echo of *balalaïkas* playing that wonderful song of the Volga boatmen, resounds in the ear of memory. It cannot, however, prevent my suspecting that the voyage down the Volga, which from afar sounds so alluring, must be—at least as far as the landscape is concerned—very monotonous. . . . For a moment the clouds part and the argent moon appears coldly radiant in the centre of blue sky strewn with glittering stars; then they draw together once more as we cross the Volga on a modern bridge. In this pallid light the river is—nevertheless—clearly visible, stretching away grey-white, barred just here by the sombre shadows of the bridge, and further off marble-like, all streaked and spotted by drifting snow; finally it is lost to view in the ashen distance around a bend where a line of yellow lights curves away, glistening softly. A flock of large black birds is passing over the river close to the bridge, winging without a sound swiftly northward.

The first of what will probably be a series of

misadventures due to my ignorance of Russian, has just occurred. On leaving Moscow there was a dining-car only mildly odorous, in which *table-d'hôte* meals were served; so I had nothing to do but sit at table and wait to see what the strangely written menu really meant. It appears, however, that the dining-car is to be changed each day; this noon I found it separated from the sleeping-car by a line of fourth-class carriages, which to traverse is a veritable trial. In these cars, the passage leads through an apparently endless succession of doors in the partitions dividing them into separate compartments, where men, women, and children of the poorest classes are piled together on a series of wooden shelves. The temperature is that of a fiery furnace, and all ventilation is rigorously excluded; the stench defies conception by even the liveliest imagination. I have learned that the least painful method of passing through, is to draw a long breath on the open platform separating the cars and then rush through, slamming doors and holding my breath till the further platform is reached. As the new dining-car is hermetically sealed, and admits third, if not fourth-class passengers, the nose can scarcely distinguish between it and a fourth-class carriage; the heat makes one's head reel, while the acrid odour seizes one by the throat and almost nauseates. To my horror, I discovered that I now had to order *à la carte* from a menu whose curious characters I could not even read. Pointing in desperation to

two names, which I imagined to be probably a soup and a roast, I waited patiently for twenty minutes, breathing the mephitic atmosphere of this delectable carriage; then to my dismay, I was served with a noisome mess of fish coated with sickly sauce, that I did not dare touch. This, I thought, must be the dish I had expected to prove a soup; but a quarter of an hour's wait having produced nothing more, I was forced to indicate to the waiter a dish near the end of the list; this manoeuvre finally secured the half of an edible partridge. For the guileless and tongue-tied foreigner, dining on a Russian train is certainly hazardous!

February 10th

Early this morning we passed through Orenburg; now the desert steppes have begun—an undivided waste of snow and clouds. We are entering Central Asia, passing through the land of the Kirghiz Cossacks and the Tartar hordes. The idea that I am really crossing this ancient and half fabulous country is strange, but the familiar international *wagon-lit* in which I find myself, makes it seem a part of everyday European travel. Comfort in travelling is certainly very welcome, but there is no denying how completely it routs the unusual and the picturesque. . . . The steppe stretches away outside the window, an absolutely level expanse of vaporous snow, which a few hundred yards off melts into a sky without form, colour,

or motion. Wind moving across the surface, gives the snow a misty cloud-like appearance, so that looking out with eyes slightly closed, it is impossible to distinguish between earth and sky. All that is visible is a nebulous wall—a vertical something entirely without solidity, which it would be erroneous to call grey, since its pallor is no more than absence of all colour. On looking more closely, a faint line is just discernible where rising ground breaks through the snow; or at long intervals a solitary tree stands out, bent and black, the only precise form in all this vagueness. Now and then in the foreground, withered weeds and stubble pierce the snow, sometimes growing formlessly, sometimes in rows and curves. Perhaps a line of trees may bar the white with a black line, half effaced as the snow rises, whirling away before the wind; perhaps a single house comes into sight, half hidden in the drifts among a few bare trees. At rare intervals a slight eminence is covered by a village, the roofs of whose one-storeyed wooden houses are concealed by snow, with only a narrow strip peeping out from the whiteness in which they are so deeply sunk that earth and houses can scarcely be distinguished. Scattered trees peer over what must be the ridge-poles, while the church rises conspicuously in the middle of the village, dominating everything in sight by its yellow belfry and green spire, standing beside the square mass of the church proper, with yellow walls and roof just perceptibly green, from which

rise four little domes, and—in the centre—a fifth and larger one faintly blue. Sometimes at the end of the long band of dull colour which represents the village, a smaller church may be seen with a slender steeple but no domes. Once there were three dull brown wind-mills, their squat sails turning industriously, outlined against the endless grey.

A sleigh or a few figures may be seen moving toward or from the always distant station—when the village has one. Here where we have just stopped, nothing is visible but the station, painted a cheerful ochre with white trimmings; its red roof is half hidden by snow and fringed with icicles; in front of its tightly closed door, an attendant is standing with feet side by side and arms hanging motionless, except when he lifts a hand to rub his ears. The building, against which the snow has risen in wave-like drifts, stands in a fenced enclosure where a few trees, slender and bare, grow out of the snow. Only the moaning wind is audible, until a bell rings as we move slowly off, and a dun-coloured cow comes into sight around the corner of the station, standing absolutely still beside the house. For a short distance an unpainted wooden fence, quite yellow against the white, runs along beside the lines to break the drifts of snow; then once more we are lost in a vague expanse. Nothing is visible fifty yards from the window, in front of which mist and snow, moving before the wind, mingle in impenetrable veils.

It is an appropriate setting in which to read Dostoyevsky's work of genius: *The Idiot*—a strange book, formless even for a Russian novel, and singularly disconcerting. It is impossible not to wonder whether people ever existed, so frenzied as those here described: men and women continually swept away by sensations they do not themselves altogether understand, conversing endlessly without quite knowing what they wish to say, like men drunk or carried away by passion; creatures aimlessly driven hither and yon by emotion, precisely as the snow and vapour whirl away in wreaths before the wind rushing across the steppes in the dim world outside my window.

A wild night slowly gathers around the moving train; a gale rages, driving the snow before it across plains that are ghostly in the wan light which a hidden moon sheds through a pall of clouds. Looking out of the window, I feel as though I were at the bottom of the sea, or moving in a strange world of vapour. When I step out at a station, the wind howls around me, wringing and bending the inky boughs of a few naked trees, while it whirls the snow into long clouds of white, that rush wildly round and up as they are flung against the walls and then high into the sable immensity.

February 11th

This morning there is a change of scenery so complete as to seem like a new setting on the stage.

At first the earth—although nearly bare—still held a considerable amount of snow; but now at eleven o'clock it has almost disappeared, leaving only small patches sprinkled over a dirty-brown plain that stretches to the horizon absolutely level, except where at rare intervals a row of humpy hillocks breaks the monotony. The ground is covered with a straggling growth of sere yellow grass. From time to time, we pass encampments of nomad Kirghiz with flocks of sheep and stray camels quietly grazing nearby. Men dressed in dust-coloured garments move across the desert, mounted on camels. The sun is shining brightly, and the unclouded sky is of pale blue fading into grey as it sinks toward the horizon. A flock of birds is winging its way close to the ground - a black mass of swiftly moving specks, which at times disintegrates, rising and falling like grain thrown into the air. It would be easy to imagine one's self crossing the high plateaus of Algeria, and no scene could, in its desert brightness, offer a greater contrast to the bleak snows of yesterday.

Just now the dried grass grows quite thickly, with great stretches where feathery tufts still cling to the pale gold stalks. Here and there it has been cut and piled in small rectangular heaps, almost without colour. Nomad camps are quite numerous, of which nothing is visible but a low wall of sun-dried earth, surmounted by some sort of brushwood. The sun is almost hot; we are really in Asia, moving southward across the cradle

of humanity, toward the land of Tīmūr and of Chingiz Khān.

At the stations, plenty of Kirghiz are to be seen walking the platforms; squat men with a yellowish skin and flat Mongolian faces. The most noticeable thing about them is their fur-lined caps with coverings for the ears and neck that can be turned up, but are now worn down, forming a kind of hood. At a door in the train, a Tartar woman from Kasan is standing; she has a square block of purple velvet embroidered in silver, perched on the front of her head under her shawl; but her high boots of soft yellow leather, decorated with red, blue, and green patches of the same material, are the most startling part of her costume.

At Perovsk which we left a short time ago, I nearly got into serious trouble because—not knowing that we had crossed the frontier of Turkestan—I took a photograph of Saïd standing beside the train, and another of some people grouped about the car door. The excitement was intense; station-masters, *gendarmes*, soldiers, and I know not what other officials, crowded around me, talking volubly but politely in Russian, of which I could understand only the word passport; this I produced, but there would probably have been no end of trouble, had I not been the bearer of a letter from the Russian ambassador, requesting all police and customs authorities to treat me with civility. This seemed to have a calming effect and I was permitted—to my great relief—

to board the train just as it was moving off. However, at the next station a soldier—with his gun on his shoulder—marched through the corridor of the sleeping-car, asking for the passport and name of the Frenchman travelling on the train; as I had spoken to the officials in French, which they did not understand but undoubtedly recognised, it was probably about me that further enquiries were desired; as luck would have it, one of the carriages really was occupied by a Frenchman who produced all manners of papers, so I was left unmolested.

This Frenchman, who speaks Russian and has already aided me several times in my struggle to order meals, is a curious fellow of a rough but interesting type. He lives in Moscow, engaged in some business for which he is now travelling to Tashkent. His wearing the ribbon of the *Légion d'Honneur*, is explained by the fact that he was a member of Charcot's expedition to the Pole. He has also lived five years in Mongolia, alone with the natives, prospecting for mines; he is therefore full of interesting yarns. Strangely enough, his travelling companion is a Spanish painter domiciled in Paris; in the sleeping-car there are also Armenian carpet merchants on the way to visit their factories at Merv, so we make a ludicrous jumble of nationalities.

Across the plain now without a trace of snow, and so dark a brown as almost to seem black, the crimson sun has just vanished from a metallic

sky, leaving the shadows to sweep over the steppe and close in around the train; but a full and frosty moon soon drives them from the unclouded heaven, and gazes down on solemn groups of camels, standing motionless near every station.

February 12th

We passed through Tashkent before dawn this morning, and now the scenery is somewhat different to that of yesterday. It is still a plain, but no longer the desert steppe; just an absolutely flat expanse, faintly tinged with the dirty green of short grass, traversed here and there by the brown line of a road or an irrigation canal—both of them signs we are no longer among the nomads; as a matter of fact, we have left the Kirghiz behind and are now among the sedentary Sarths. Quite frequently we pass their settlements; a mud wall enclosing mud houses roofed with thatch, while hardby groves of slender trees, rude and very boggy roads, horses, and cows, complete the picture. The first chain of mountains I have seen since entering Russia, comes into sight about ten o'clock; near the ground their bases fade into the bluish mist, until the summits seem to float above an earth with which they have no contact; the snow-capped ridges, however, stand out in opalesque tones of white delicately touched with mauve and pink, sharply outlined against mother-of-pearl clouds that begin to melt as they rise toward the zenith, fraying away in the blue.

At the stations it is really hot in the sun. The type of men has changed once more, Sarths taking the place of Kirghiz in the idle curious groups gathered on the platforms to watch what is probably the great event of each day, the passage of the train. They are taller and in every way larger built men than the Kirghiz, from whom they also differ in their darker brown complexions and the long black beards they often wear. They dress in a long garment, a cross between an overcoat and a dressing gown, made of some cotton stuff brilliantly striped or patterned, and obviously lined with a heavier material; this descends to the knees and is held in place by a gaudy handkerchief twisted around the waist. Their visible clothing is completed by high boots of black leather, and either strips of dirty white twisted into turbans, or else skull-caps of bright colours and lively patterns.

Beyond Tchernyayevo the line turns sharply westward toward the Caspian Sea, across a very flat desert, in colour a sickly brown changing to dull olive. At no great distance to the south, a noble range of mountains rises directly from the plain, its forms all clearly visible; first the lower spurs, brownish turning to blackish grey; then a little higher, streaks and patches of snow lying in shady folds, above which the great flanks lift up bare pointed peaks, all crinkled and ridged, pearly-coloured and flecked with soft shadows. . . . All day the scenery scarcely varies; when we

finally reach Samarqand, night has come; for it is ten minutes past six by railway or Petersburg time, but really almost nine by local time. We have been a hundred hours crossing the scarcely inhabited wastes of Russian Asia. A long drive by moonlight, over a cobble road bordered by tall leafless plane-trees, brings me to the bright and tawdry street of a modern provincial town with its one-storeyed sorry hotel. At last I am really in Samarqand *la bien gardée*; but everything in sight is so like all the rest of the vulgar modern world, that—even with the moon's help—it is impossible to feel thrilled.

February 13th

The Samarqand of to-day is divided into two entirely distinct parts—the modern Russian town, and the old or more correctly the native city; for of ancient Samarqand, the seat of learning and the capital of Timūr, no vestige is left other than the splendid fragments of a few great monuments. The Russian town is formed of one-storeyed houses, shops or dwellings, built along broad avenues lined with tall plane-trees—a tawdry town typical of the commercial life of to-day. The native city is merely a series of broad streets, where at present black mud, deep and viscous, makes any progress an acrobatic feat; the houses are, with the exception of a few Russian buildings, nothing more than wooden shanties. This renowned city of Samarqand, whose beginnings are lost in the

mystery of unrecorded time, whose glory filled all Asia with its rumour, in the days when her walls resounded with the noise of building, as Tīmūr and his issue bade their artisans rear those monuments which still adorn her downfall; to-day offers to the curious wanderer come from afar, no aspects quaint or picturesque, no features of interest, except shattered mosques and mausoleums rising out of the sordid native town, much as broken shafts of marble might emerge from a heap of refuse. To one who has seen an oriental city before, Samarqand offers nothing novel in the way of native life. The fine trees which fill the modern and surround both the new and the old town, must in spring and summer add some beauty to the place; but now they are bare and brown, almost shabby-looking with their scaled bark and stray leaves dangling stiff and dead; so, if anything, they contribute to the shoddy and neglected air of the city. This impression is certainly heightened, perhaps partly created, by a sullen sky of leaden grey overhanging the entire scene without light or life. The one thing beautiful is the noble chain of snowy mountains, distant only some eighteen versts, of which a glimpse is caught at every turn. I am told that they are mantled with snow, or at least that the summits are, even in summer-time; and the sight of these white-wreathed peaks, under an azure sky and over the green tops of swaying locust or poplar trees, must indeed be delightful.

My first visit is to the tomb of that mighty monarch, the conqueror Tīmūr Lang, Tīmūr the Lame, better known as Tamerlane, or even—since he has stirred the imagination of all ages—to lovers of the Elizabethans, as Tamburlaine. A first glimpse caught by the road through a tracery of bare brown boughs, is of a splendid dome still partly covered by tiles of a deep turquoise blue. After the fashion of all domes in Samarqand, it rises from, and projects beyond, a circular drum ornamented with coloured patterns and inscriptions, formed by glazed tiles set in the unglazed buff brick of which the major part of the tomb is built. This drum ends in, or—more correctly—is crowned by, a series of elaborate honeycomb vaultings in true Arabic style, forming corbels from which the dome springs; the diameter of its base being in consequence somewhat greater than that of the drum it overhangs. The cupola is not hemispherical, but pointed and much stilted—rather like an egg sliced off considerably below the middle; in this case it is ribbed in a way I can only describe as being like the flutings on a cake, that is to say, the ribs or flutes leave no flat surface between them, each touching the other and terminating on its own corbel. The whole dome was once covered with tiles of a hue best called turquoise, but very dark and at the same time very vivid, that must have formed a striking mass of colour. The entrance is through a gateway, once part of a portal wall pierced by an immense arch-

way, forming a flat niche with the actual door in its centre; wall and arch have fallen and disappeared, nothing remaining to-day but a flat wall with its door-opening, and two now buttress-like shafts of masonry rising at either side of the wall. Within, there is a small and ruinous courtyard, where a few leafless cherry-trees grow in front of the mausoleum. This façade was originally composed of a great portal with its arched opening, flanked on either side by lower wings; the entire archway with the wall it supported, and the whole second storey of the left wing, have vanished; to-day what was once the rear wall of the portal arch, rises free some thirty feet behind the right wing of the façade, looking like a small building stupidly placed almost in front of the mausoleum. The one remaining storey of the left wing also gives the impression of an unrelated building, so that only after some thought is it possible to discover what the original front must really have been like. The fall of the portal wall has revealed the dome with its drum rising above the front of the tomb proper, which is but little wider than the drum itself; the effect being like that of some immense and glorified mushroom of the pointed species that never opens out. The entire building is built with small, rather thin bricks, unglazed and in colour a warm buff; it is ornamented with patterns of endless variety and complexity—either glazed bands of mosaic tiling, or designs (and even Arabic inscriptions of large size) made by

placing blue bricks in fixed positions among the yellow. The only colour employed in these decorations is blue, in shades varying from a deep sapphire, rich and glowing, up to a brilliant but fairly dark turquoise, really more green than blue. In the mosaics, white is used to form boundary lines, flowers, or even letters, which in the smaller inscriptions are written in flowing Arabic script, whilst the larger ones, made with separate bricks, are composed in the rectilinear block character called Kufic.

The main entrance to the tomb-chamber is closed by a door of pierced wood, so the visitor must enter at the left by a dark corridor vaulted with a series of little domes borne by pendentives. The interior of the tomb is built on the plan invariably found in all buildings at Samarqand; one of noble simplicity, but in detail so varied as never to pall. The four walls enclose a square, each wall having in the centre an arched opening with a reveal of several feet, forming a niche filled with stalactite vaulting, that looks like nothing so much as a giant honeycomb built by some monstrous species of bee; this vaulting starts from the rear wall and curves forward to within about two feet of the main wall surface, making roughly a half dome over a niche rectangular in plan. The square area of the entire chamber is covered by a dome; to say that it is carried on pendentives, would scarcely convey an idea of the curious construction; the circular drum rests on an octagon

obtained by cutting off the corners of the square enclosed by the four walls, with a plane pierced by a vaulted niche; the sort of corbel thus formed offers a triangular surface to carry the drum, but at the level of the string course consists of no more than two tiny triangles joining the wall. From below, the eye looks into a vaulted surface that transforms the square into an octagon, in outline scarcely different to the circle above; the whole system is highly ingenious and successful. . . . The walls of the tomb are covered and patterned, to about a man's height, with small octagons of marble, now almost aquamarine in colour. This marble surface is finished by two ornamented bands; the upper part of the walls is laid with stucco wrought into a net-work of complicated designs, in the old days painted with bright colours of which faint traces still remain. The dome shows a few remnants of what was once an elaborate wooden casing, probably of cedar.

The greater part of the floor-space is railed off by a very low screen of pierced marble, forming an enclosure where the cenotaphs of Timūr and his family stand, the actual graves being—as is usual in the Orient—situated in a subterranean vault. Timūr's monument, made of two blocks of green-black nephrite marble, is placed near, but not actually in, the centre of the building; for Orientals frequently neglect, or even avoid, the central position we should hold essential to a prominent tomb. The largest and—except for its colour—

the most conspicuous of the cenotaphs lies close to the main entrance, between two high poles of natural wood not unlike slender masts; fastened at right angles to the poles, are small wooden rods, from which depend, in one case the remnants of a banner, in the other a short bushy horse's tail, —an emblem in these parts used to mark the graves of honourable or holy persons. A similar pole and trophy stand in one of the great niches. Access to the crypt with the real tomb being gained by a flight of steps in the corner of the building, unprotected by railings, the sombre void seems newly revealed by the withdrawal of some mysterious slab. As my turbaned guide goes down the steps, light in hand, and disappears around the corner, I am instantly reminded of *The Arabian Nights*, with their magic stairs, such as Aladdin descended into the jewelled treasure-cave. The vault-like crypt is only lighted by tapers placed in the centre on wooden standards, from which the wax drips steadily. It is impressive to find the tomb of this fourteenth century conqueror, the Asiatic Napoleon, still visited by many in our strange twentieth century; but my mood is somewhat disturbed, when I am asked to deposit a few *kopecks* in the hollows scooped in the tomb-stone to receive offerings to pay for the tapers burning beside the grave; dignity seems quite as rare in far-off changeless Asia as in our modern Europe.

But even so, this dim vault affords me a curious proof of the overwhelming power of imaginative

genius. I have read not a little about Tīmūr Lang, so the facts of his career are familiar to me; I can readily recall the ferocious conqueror who passed through Dāmghān, "raving, impatient, desperate and mad," and left, as a sign of his horrible vengeance, four towers built with human heads cemented in mud, which were "so high that a man could scarcely throw a stone over them"; and were seen by Ruy Gonzalez de Clavijo, passing through on an embassy almost a quarter of a century later; yet this historical image vanishes like mist, giving way to the glowing vision of Marlowe's high-speaking (yes, at times—if you will—bombastic) hero; that Tamburlane who, like leaping flame, incarnates the exuberant ardour of Elizabethan glory. Here in this gusty vault, standing beside Tīmūr's grave in his birthplace Samarqand, the reality lies for me, not in the tomb and in history, but rather in the lover of "divine Zenocrate," from whose lips there fell some of the noblest accents English poetry has ever heard; through the semi-dark I catch the sounding syllables:—

"What is beauty, saith my sufferings, then?

If all the pens that ever poets held

Had fed the feeling of their masters' thoughts,

And every sweetness that inspired their hearts,

Their minds, and muses on admirèd themes:

If all the heavenly quintessence they still

From their immortal flowers of poesy,

Wherein, as in a mirror, we perceive

The highest reaches of a human wit;
If these had made one poem's period,
And all combined in beauty's worthiness,
Yet should there hover in their restless heads
One thought, one grace, one wonder, at the least,
Which into words no virtue can digest."

Leaving dreams and the tomb of Tīmūr Lang behind, I now take my way toward the native town on whose outskirts the mausoleum stands. The ancient city is approached, first through an open square lying between it and the Russian town, with fine vistas of the distant snow-peaks; then by a long rather wide street, where a deep black bog serves as roadway. This unattractive avenue is bordered by low wooden houses, usually one-storeyed, but sometimes completed by a second storey projecting like a balcony; these hovels are used as booths, where all the industries, filth, stench, and disease of an oriental town are gathered together. There are only two things in any way peculiar to Samarqand; the first is a species of unhappy quail, kept in tiny wicker cages shaped like bee-hives, to be used—I am told—like cocks in a bird fight; the second is the women. They are veiled, but not as in other parts of the Orient. The sheath—since there is no other name to describe it—in which they are enveloped, does not hang down over the face pierced by eyelets, neither is it drawn across, leaving a hole through which one eye just peers; it wraps the head after the

fashion of a European shawl, and is fastened under the chin, whilst the entire oval of the face is covered by a mask of stiff black, like a close-meshed wire netting. This visard is impenetrable to the gaze of passers-by, unless the women chance to pass in front of a very strong light; even then, no more than an outline is visible. The effect of this rounded black mask is startling, as it emerges from the mantle that wraps the women from the crown of the head to the hem of their gown. These shrouds are made of some cotton material, in either dark blue or blackish grey; and are decorated with two bands, starting from embroidered squares placed where the edges of the garment are fastened together under the chin, then following up the hem, until they almost meet at the centre of the head, from which they fall free, gradually narrowing until they are held in place near the bottom of the mantle by two smaller squares of embroidery.

The main street does not lead directly into the Registān, but passes behind the shabby row of wooden booths which forms one side of the square. The celebrated Registān, or market-place, is a large square space bordered on three sides by mosques that must, in their prime, have possessed such glory of colour and form as made of this market-place one of the splendours of the world. All three mosques are alike in general plan, but each varies in detail and has its own individuality. The main feature is an immense, nearly square

wall-screen, placed in the centre of the façade, and pierced by a gigantic pointed arch, leaving no more of the wall surface than a comparatively narrow strip on either side, and a small expanse above; this archway, being closed at a depth of some twenty feet by a wall, forms an enormous flat niche. The surface of the rear wall is occupied, up to the spring of the arch, by a composition formed by a large archway flanked by two smaller ones, surmounted by two others rising to the crown of the centre archway; these openings do not pierce the wall, but are in their turn walled up to form smaller niches, of which the middle one is deeper than those at the side; these are cut by the real doorways—rectangular openings of moderate size. The great tympanum above this series of niches, is bare and broken only by a tiny opening that permits a fleck of sky to peer through with charming effect. The deep reveals, seen in relation to the great depth of the main opening, are very striking and add to the sense of size; while the large grouped arches—being in relation to the opening of the immense niche in which they stand, very small—give such scale as makes the main arch appear gigantic. The conception is very noble and most imposing. The narrow strips of wall surface on each side of the great archway, are treated with vertical ornament carried clear to the top of the wall-screen—like vast pilasters flanking the portal—and interrupting the horizontal band which runs across just over the keystone. On

either side of this great central mass, is a low, rather short wing, terminated by a lofty minaret—very slender and tapering toward the top, where a series of corbels finishes it with a kind of capital, formerly surmounted by an elaborate cage of pierced wood for the muezzin to call the name of Allah.¹ These low wings and slim towers enhance the majesty of the portal screen.

These mosques, like the Tomb of Timūr Lang and all the other buildings in Samarqand, were built with small buff bricks, entirely covered by a veneer of choicer materials in patterns of endless variety;—either radiant tile-mosaics in every shade of blue, or else yellow bricks of finer quality with designs in enamelled brick and tile. This exquisite facing has in the course of centuries fallen away in places, exposing wide areas of tawny brick. What we see to-day is, therefore, only the crumbling wreck of vanished glories; even so it is very beautiful, for it is architecture with such noble simplicity of conception as needs no ornament. When intact, glittering with their exquisite contrasts of yellow and varied blue, these mosques must have been splendid beyond anything we see in our drab modern world. In the spring, silhouetted against the pearly or opalescent tones of distant mountains, under a sky as brilliant as their own enamels, they must have resembled one

¹ For an example of these wooden cages, see the photograph of the minaret at Samnān facing page 207.

of those magic pictures we imagine but never see with fleshly eyes.

On the outskirts of the native town, northward from the Registān, are the ruins of the Mosque of Bībī Khānum, built by Tīmūr in honour of a peculiarly beloved wife, and finally shattered by cannon, when in 1866 the Russians took Samarqand. In the morning I could not enter because, being Friday, the Moslem Sarths were at prayer, seated cross-legged on the ground in regular rows—like chessmen. Now it is deserted; a little door admits me into a neglected courtyard filled with desolate locust-trees, stripped bare and shivering under the solemn sombre sky. In the centre the famous desk built with huge slabs of stone to hold a gigantic copy of the Qur'ān, still remains, and is—they tell me—still thought to confer fertility on sterile women who crawl beneath it. The main gateway of the enclosure is in ruins, but standing. The mosque is built against the rear wall. Its mighty portal is not flanked by wings, as in the Registān, but is buttressed by two minarets terminating the wall after the fashion of engaged columns. The majestic mass of this portal, and the relation between its main arch and the smaller one within, give the façade a dignified simplicity that no church I have ever seen can surpass. The tympanum of the rear wall has fallen, revealing all that is left of the outer dome—a fissured quarter still glittering with tiles of deep turquoise blue. Inside, the same proud simplicity prevails; just

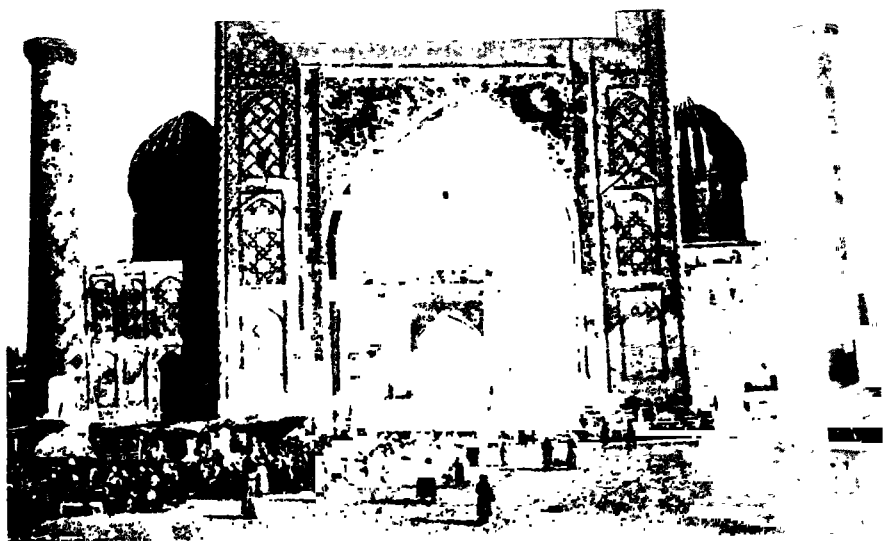
four walls enclosing a square, each one with an arched sinkage in the centre offering a motive for decoration. These walls, with the help of corner corbels like those at Tīmūr's Mausoleum, support a great cupola that calls to mind how:—

“In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
A stately pleasure-dome decree:
Where Alph the sacred river ran.”

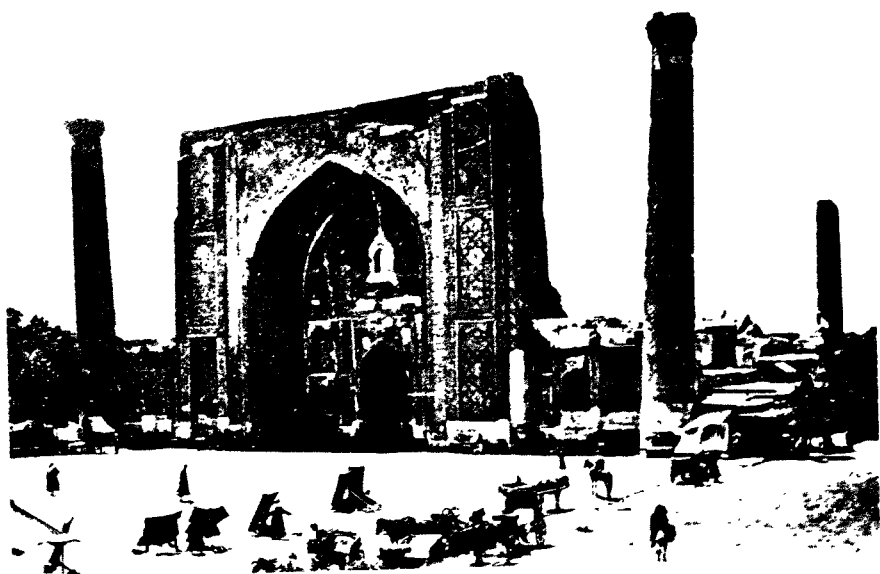
Viewed from outside, the buff walls and the great drum which carries the shattered cupola—greenish blue patterned with inscriptions in stately Kufic characters six feet high—form a most impressive wreck.

Down the hillside below the Mosque of Bibi Khānum, lies the Shāh Zinda group of mausoleums. The entrance is at the bottom of a small but steep ravine, down which a flight of stone steps descends to a particularly soft black bog, doing duty as a road. A gateway, reproducing the main features of the mosque portals on a smaller scale, leads to a restricted level space with a portico for prayer to the left—a modern building whose wooden roof is gaudily painted in greens, blues, reds, and gold, resting on grey mast-like pillars of wood. A paved and narrow path stretches up the steep hillside away to the distant summit; first of all steps, then a sharp incline, and at the last a gentle slope. Bordering both sides, is a succession of mausoleums, built to honour either holy men, or relatives and descendants of Tīmūr

Lang. They are small domed buildings of exquisite workmanship, more fully covered with tiles than the mosques, and also better preserved. The richness and complexity of their mosaic defies description by word, and would all but defy a rendering with lines. These lovely tombs look like shining enamels or carven jewels, deep sapphire blue in general effect, but patterned with varying tones paling out to verdant turquoise. They are all crowned with variously shaped small domes, showing wide surfaces of buff above the encrusted walls; domes that group themselves in curious combinations as the pathway bends between the walls and mounts the hill. On the level at the further end of the street above me, the brown boughs of a bare tree lean over the wall, swaying gently. How lovely they must be, when in spring they are wreathed with fine emerald leaves, flinging a diaper of shadow across the dull saffron walls! Even to-day the prospect is full of charm, looking down the hillside out across the picturesque intermixture of domes and wall-surfaces, with their delightful contrast between tawny bricks and shining tiles of bright enameled blue,—away to the range of snow-peaks coldly blue-white under a sky of leaden grey. At the upper end of the narrow street the Mosque of Shāh Zinda is entered between two delicately carved doors wrought with deep-cut foliage, to which are attached two metal handles so pierced as to look like brazen lace. Thence a little portal



The Great Mosque
The Registān, Samarqand



The Mosque of Ulug Beg
The Registān, Samarqand



The Mosque of Bibi Khānum, Samarqand



Mosque of Shāh Zinda, Samarqand

leads out on the barren heights now called Afrāsī-yāb, where the prehistoric town of Maracanda once lay. It is a blackened expanse, unkempt and filled with graves; very sordid but offering a splendid view across the city (where Bibi Khānum's Mosque towers near at hand) to those snow mountains which engirdle all that is left of Tīmūr's Samarqand. The name itself is full of magic, but of romance the modern town can offer no trace; these ruins of buff and blue lying below and before me, are—however—even in their dilapidation, so truly noble as well to merit a visit. It is quite probable that in a flood of springtide sun, under skies of radiant blue, amid newly green trees waving softly under the shadow of the shimmering hills of snow, Samarqand might even at present possess a loveliness I can scarcely divine on so dreary a winter day.

February 14th

In Turkestan permission to take photographs is even more difficult to obtain, more involved in endless formality, than in Russia itself—which is saying not a little. Yesterday I spent the greater part of an afternoon driving about in pursuit of my permit. Samarqand's supply of generals is apparently without limit, since my search led me to five, all very courteous; the first declared himself incompetent to grant my request, and referred me to a second; he told me to address myself to a

third, who proved to be ill, so his wife sent me to another; by this one I was directed in despair to a Tartar general, who finally gave me the necessary document. When this troublesome permit had at last been secured, it was far too late in the evening to use a camera; to-day snow is falling, so photography is all but out of the question. The path of the foolish foreigner in Turkestan is indeed hedged about with awesome regulations and menace.

This morning the trees of the nearer hills are draped in white, but the mountain tops have vanished behind grey veils of mist. A few flakes of snow are still drifting idly through the sombre air. In the Registān, the view from the roof of Tillah Kari's Mosque is very striking; below me is the slimy square (with even to-day a few loungers) dominated by the two great mosques, with their minarets pointing skywards like fingers; behind me are the shattered walls of Bibi Khānum's colossal mosque, emerging from the native hovels; feathery wreaths of snow lie on walls and ledges; from time to time a little flurry drifts listlessly down from the ominous sky. The mosques are really nothing more than open squares enclosed by arcades, with a lofty arch—giving on a room used for prayer—in the middle of each side; in the centre of this courtyard there is a very small edifice of brick, but no signs of water tanks—in other lands an indispensable part of mosques. The portal screen rears its vast expanse above the

roofs, in the dominant manner of stage-walls in antique Roman theatres.

When I reach the Tomb of Tīmūr, snow is falling thickly and quite fast. The buff walls with their scaling tiles, rising toward the striking mass of drum and dome, patterned and still partly blue, are extremely picturesque when seen to-day through a vale of drifting snow. The courtyard has poetry amid all this motion of filmy white; the snow seems not so much a succession of falling flakes as a continuous weaving of white lines crossing one another steadily and softly. The fluttering of this white web has about it something magical, that lends an I know not what of pathos to all it enfolds.

February 15th

On leaving Samarqand this morning, there was a heavy fall of snow, which continued as we moved slowly through the desolate scenery of an uninhabited plain covered with white; now the snow has ceased, and the clouds have lifted enough to show white hills at the foot of still invisible mountains. Here in Turkestan, the ticket-collector is continually passing through the train, preceded by the guard and a uniformed soldier carrying a gun with a fixed bayonet; sometimes the soldier is a Turkoman, wearing the immense shaggy black cloak of his people, but with a cap instead of the usual fur bonnet—a concession, I suppose, to official uniform. This martial procession is quite

awesome to the meek European, so frequently reminded that he travels in Turkestan only on sufferance and under surveillance; officials holding telegrams appear at stations to enquire if one is the person whose passage is signalled in the despatch; soldiers on the train have heard that a foreigner of such and such a strangely perverted name is expected to travel through; so there is a general sense of being observed, which makes Russia with its passport formalities, seem an easy-going land of the free.

At every station, somewhere on or near the platform, there is a rough table made of boards, painted yellow and laid loosely upon equally yellow posts driven in the ground. It forms a rough buffet behind which two to four women stand, each with a boiling samovar before her. The travellers rush up to have their own teapots filled with boiling water from the samovars. Sometimes the women come scurrying out of nearby houses with the bubbling urns in their hands, just as the train is about to leave the station; then there is a great "to-do." Bread is also sold, and bottles of some milky liquid that must be a kind of koumiss; sometimes there are pointed melons with smooth rinds of a pale lemon colour, each one neatly done up in a harness of vegetable fibre, so it can be carried without slipping out of the hand. The meat of these melons is snowy white and deliciously flavored.

In the second-class carriages are many Sarths,

apparently more prosperous than those who appear at stations. Two things about their clothes are conspicuous: the end of their turban, falling far enough down the left side to touch the shoulder, —and the sleeves of their outer coat, which drop a foot or more below the hands when the arms hang straight, making the men look as though they had lost their forearms; sometimes they cross their hands within the sleeves, which then serve as muffs. These long sleeves must have been common in mediæval Russia, since I have seen them both in old prints and in the costumes of a legendary opera. Some of the men wear a girdle over the outer cloak; others leave it free to hang loose, only girding up the inner garments. Nearly all have boots of supple leather, thrust into stout slippers that can be discarded on entering the houses. They all smoke a water-pipe, or narghile, quite unlike the Turkish ones commonly seen in the West. These have a lower part shaped like a jar and made of brass, out of which a stiff stem of metal or reed projects at an acute angle,—the flexible leather pipe of the hookah being apparently unknown in these parts. The upper stem, coal-basin, and pipe-bowl, are more or less like those in use elsewhere. In smoking they usually place a finger over a little vent in the pipe's brazen bowl, and then draw furiously. Here at the stations, a man with a lighted pipe stands on the platform, just as he would before a café in the street of a town; passengers rush up in turn and give him

a quarter kopeck for a few puffs, usually with the vendor still holding the pipe.

At Kagan I am obliged to take a little branch train, that has no first-class carriages. One of my fellow-travellers in the car where we are all piled, is a well-to-do merchant travelling from Khokand. He wears a long garment—rather like a frock-coat—made of European-looking cloth, under which there is a vest of the same material, with a high standing collar buttoned tightly round a green silk scarf. The coat is held in at the waist by a broad belt, with ornaments of brass rudely shaped like the letter S. His high black boots are of soft leather, with a neat slipper over the foot. His head is covered by a conical and embroidered skull-cap, around which a turban of fine white silk is wound, so that only the point of the cap can be seen; but this turban is unwound and laid aside when the train is moving. He also possesses a long and thoroughly European overcoat of greenish blue. With his black beard and neat clothes, he makes quite a fine figure. I and my luggage attract his undivided attention; he has just enquired of the guide I engaged in Samarkand—an honest Russian from the German-speaking provinces—where I come from; of course he takes me for a commercial traveller, tourists being almost unknown in this country; hence his professional interest in the—to him—enormous quantity of my luggage. While I am occupying his polite curiosity, the little train puffs along

slowly over a desert plain, out of which Bukhārā finally emerges about six o'clock.

February 16th

As the native city is at a distance from the Hotel Tūrān—quite a clean little place, where fresh bedding is to be had, but at a tariff higher than that for linen already used!—I took a carriage to drive to the bank, of whose existence Bukhārīāt drivers and natives appear profoundly ignorant. We finally reached the walls engirdling the town proper, and entered after much delay in front of a gateway, where a tangle of carts, teamsters, and onlookers, was vociferously engaged in trying to get the teams through heavy mud and up a monstrous hummock in the road. After much driving about through the bottomless bog of streets, where two carriages can scarcely pass, the bank was reached; whence—my business ended—I set out on foot, accompanied by my guide, to see the ancient and famous city of the Amīrs.

It is another of the raw grey days that I am beginning to think inevitable in Turkestan. Great Bukhārā, the mightiest mart in mid-Asia, lies within walls of clay some twenty feet high but is no more than a net-work of moderately wide unpaved streets, debouching into small market-places that chance or habit have placed here and there. With a blazing sun to illumine the brilliant costumes, and cast over everything

the enchantment of golden light mingled with shadow, the city might be picturesque; for there is no doubt that, to reveal its secrets, the Orient requires the splendour of sun-rays shooting through breathless haze. To-day under a chilly sullen sky, all things appear lifeless and dull. The sordid is so much more patent than anything else, as to be painful. Divested of the contrast between shadow and reflected light, the walls are obviously built with mud. The roadways form a viscous bog, the mere sight of which is nauseous, whilst walking in the black slime is as repulsive as it is fatiguing. The most conspicuous wares displayed for sale are trumpery objects brought from the Occident, such as may be seen in the poorest quarters of any western city. The costumes are generally made of stuffs broadly striped with brilliant colours, obviously indigenous and therefore prettier than the printed cottons shipped from Moscow; yet even they are ineffective in the drab light of so sombre a day. It may be that in the sensation of the already seen, I am merely paying the penalty exacted of all who travel much; but certainly after Algeria and Tunis, Bukhārā's renowned bazar offers no surprise. In point of picturesqueness, it cannot be compared to the cleaner and better built bazars of Tunis; while both the costumes and those who wear them lack that distinction which marks the Arab.

The very name of Bukhārā has for me always

been a potent spell, evoking a princely city of learning in old days, with a boundless bazar nobly vaulted, where—through apertures left in the vault-crowns—quivering beams of light shoot down and leap from gorgeous stuff to gorgeous stuff. This fabulous city I did not expect to find in reality; but I did hope to encounter something more strange and beautiful than the city I see to-day. A sense of depression and disillusion, vague but hard to dismiss, has in consequence stolen over me. Perhaps had I visited Bukhārā before similar places in other lands, certainly had I seen it for the first time under sunlight falling from a sky of ultramarine, I might have felt otherwise; since these cold and sober days make one keenly conscious of all the filth, cruelty, and carelessness, which form so real and horrible a part of life in towns of the eastward world.

The boggy streets through which I pick my way with difficulty, are for the most part covered over by flat roofs, borne by round beams of no great size, and from time to time pierced by openings to admit the light. Both sides of these slimy sombre passages are bordered by diminutive shops, where merchants squat among their goods in oriental style—though I notice that here, instead of sitting cross-legged, they kneel with legs stretched out behind them, so the body rests on the upturned heels. Most of the wares are either cotton stuffs, probably of European manufacture and shoddy articles of household use from the

West, or else native food in various stages of filth. There is nothing attractive for sale except pointed caps—small gaily made affairs, which the men wear with the peaks emerging from the centre of their turbans. . . . In some places the streets pass—unroofed—between the walls of houses built, like all Bukhārā, of sun-dried clay. In such places the most distinctive and the only picturesque sights are the storks' nests on the apex of every tower and on the corner of every crumbling mosque-façade. They stand out conspicuously in clumsy masses now empty, with neither occupant nor visitor, unless it be a small grey and black crow, who may by chance perch jauntily on the edge. These bowl-shaped nests produce a most ludicrous effect, overhanging and half crushing the walls or domes they cap. In bazars and streets alike, one of the most striking things is the endless quantity of pitiful dogs; poor brutes half stupefied by disease, with hairless patches of scabby swollen skin, shivering as they slink along in fear of blows or stones. So many heart-wringing curs I never saw in one place before. The misery of dumb animals is in all countries, even among the so-called civilised, horrible enough to observe; but here in the indifferent Orient, it is—to anyone afflicted with imagination—almost too ghastly to be endured.

After a little, my wanderings bring me to the Registān, which is entirely filled with small wooden booths. At one side it joins a little square, whence



A Mosque and a Hawz, Bukhārā



The Natives in the Registān, Bukhārā



The Registān, Bukhārā
 (The figure in the foreground is the merchant from Khokand, who asked to have his photograph taken)



A Group in the Registān, Bukhārā

the roadway rises suddenly to the fortified gateway of the Amīr's citadel, situated on a slight eminence, but only just visible over the roofs it dominates. This square is crowded with men, gathered here and there in groups diversely occupied. One of the largest is listening to a story-teller, who moves about while reciting with great volubility and exuberant gesture. In another place a man, seated on a rough platform covered with a piece of stuff to protect him against mud and damp, is at work polishing stones on a primitive emery wheel. From another group the Khokand merchant, whose interest I aroused on the train coming to Bukhārā, detaches himself to follow me and my camera, quite fascinated and finally unable to keep from asking me to take his photograph. Many of the costumes are extremely brilliant, being made of bright stuffs broadly striped with different colours; sometimes with a stripe of solid colour alternating with one in which different shades fade one into the other. Were the sun to cast his spell of gold and shadow-black across the scene, it would be gorgeous; even to-day beneath this lowering sky it is striking.

Across the Registān, the portal of a mosque, built after the same design as those at Samarqand, but smaller and less impressive, beetles above the shoddy booths. Here—as from nearly all the Bukhārā mosques—practically the whole of the mosaic has fallen, baring the brown rubble, to which small patches of blue cling only here and

there. Judging by what remains, the patterns of glazed brick so common in Samarqand were not used for decoration so much as tile-mosaics, where branching flowers in large vases and other devices spread over surfaces subdivided by mosaic bands. The beauty of this work must have been great, yet it is doubtful whether the general effect was so fine as that of the more architectural treatment at Samarqand. Not far from here a group of houses encloses a considerable area, almost entirely occupied by a sunken pool of opaque and greenish-black water, completely surrounded by a flight of five or six stone steps descending to the horrible liquid. A few men are gathered on the lower steps, some laving their feet, some washing mouths and hands as well as feet, still others collecting this infected water in great vessels—that are nothing more than goat-skins sewn together with the hair inside—ready to carry it away to be sold for drinking and cooking. There being several of these noisome pools in different parts of the town, the wonder is not so much that the natives are afflicted by *rishta* worms and other horrid diseases, as that any of them can live. One side of the square occupied by this particular *hawz* or tank, is bordered by an unusual kind of mosque or prayer-portico. In front of a wall with arched recesses, lofty wooden columns—in two rows of ten each—support a roof also of wood. These columns, placed on high bases curiously carved, are very slender and twisted

like a coiled snake—bulb-shaped where they rest on the bases, then tapering toward the capitals. At the top, where the shafts are necessarily very small, masses of Arabic honeycomb carving suddenly spread out wider and wider, in a series of monstrous capitals made in separate pieces fastened to the pillars; almost all of them have completely disappeared, whilst in one place a few fragments, held together by string, dangle about the shaft. This portico is separated from the square by a wooden screen, and must in old days—when painted and gilded—have been a gaudy spot; to-day in this ghastly light, with its paintless wood dingy with decay, and its fragmentary capitals dangling about tottering columns, between which crows flap noisily over omnipresent dirt,—it presents an image of “dust and ashes,” that leads to trite but ever-poignant thoughts of how all things pass

Wandering through the bazars, sometimes I chance upon curious sights. Beside a gateway a man is seated, holding a falcon on his gloved hand—like some picture of a mediæval falconer come to life. The large slender bird, speckled with olive-brown and black, has a cruel look as it sits very quietly on the falconer's fist, slowly turning its curved beak and small head, without a tremor of the round wide-open eyes in which the pupils have contracted to narrow slits. Around its neck is a silver ornament with a little bell on either side, and on its legs are red jesses

fastening it to its master's hand. Man and bird are a striking survival of customs we usually think long since gone by. Through another portal not far away, I can see a court where astrakhan is being sold; tiny fleeces are lying about among the traffickers, and one poor black baby lamb—still alive—is trembling on its ludicrously long and unsteady legs; a man in Cossack dress passes me by, carrying in one hand a pitiful little fleece of shiny black, while the other grasps the steamy bleeding carcass of the newly-flayed lamb. What a brutally devouring and malignly indifferent thing life really is, when on rare occasions we dare look it square in the face!

Some notability or rich merchant has just ridden by, splashing mud in every direction as he moves down the sombre passage, where ragged retainers, running before and after him, throw into relief the dull gleam of his golden robe. Picturesque carts, such as I saw at Samarqand, pass through not infrequently. Their build is peculiar;—a pair of enormous wheels, some six or seven feet across, supports heavy shafts, on the rear half of which a rude platform is laid. Near either end of this, a sort of yoke is set up, the front one much lower than the rear one; these hoops are joined together by a frame-work covered with canvas, forming—over a portion of the platform—a shelter like a truncated cone. The wheels and shafts are unpainted; the outside of the hood is also without decoration, but its supporting

yokes and ribs are all gaily bedizened. The horses have harnesses ornamented with small white shells and beads of various colours; but the most conspicuous part is the rude saddle, on which the driver often sits with his feet resting on the shafts. Altogether these carts are strange-looking affairs as they jolt through bogs and over hummocks, shaking up the turbaned and brightly dressed occupants. The women are gowned in shrouds like those of Samarqand, but here many of them wear vivid green. Surrounding the narrow triangle of black face-veil, this brilliant colour is very startling. Turkomen are quite numerous—tall fellows with long hair under black bonnets of shaggy sheep-skin over a foot high and very big around. They wear long cloaks of some woolly cloth almost like felt, of a beautiful deep black, hanging straight in a few stiff folds, but widening out from the shoulders to nearly double the width, where at the bottom they stop just above the heels. Long strands of soft hair cling to these stately mantles, which are further enlivened by a strip of silver braid running around the neck and a few inches down the front.

As the day is raw and frosty, almost all the shops have small round braziers with squat legs, before which the immobile owners sit cross-legged, like idols in their gloomy shrines, warming their hands over the ashes and hot embers. Most of the men carry small orange-coloured gourds; these they continually raise to their mouths—

after throwing back their heads—and then shake out of them a kind of powdered chewing tobacco, everywhere exposed for sale in piles of vividly green and bilious dust, the very sight of which turns a European stomach. Gourds of all kinds abound; in fact there are whole streets in the bazar where nothing else is sold. They vary in colour from pale yellow to deep orange, with an occasional black one; and in size, range from tiny tobacco-holders to large ones hollowed out and fitted with reeds for use as narghiles.

A funeral is now passing; just a litter borne on men's shoulders, with high sides hung with gorgeous red and gold brocade, hiding the body within. The bearers utter a series of cries or moans, as they move along swiftly with no one following; but their gaudy burden, swaying to right and left, or up and down with the inequalities of the ground, suggests anything rather than death. After this Asian funeral has passed unheeded, I step through a portal into an enclosure filled by another tank of emerald slime, stagnating under the boughs of its leafless trees among scaled and crumbling walls. At one side booths are built, where men are working, and a tea-vendor has his samovars ready for use. A man is seated on a bench, with a pretty bird attached to his hand by a fine wire about its neck; it flutters and then flies, only to be forced to re-alight by the almost invisible bond which binds it to its indifferent captor. Boys and men are huddled on the ground around crates of

poultry exposed for sale; one of them is actually filled with crows, amongst which a dying bird lies on its back with fast-glazing eyes and fallen wings spread out. A dying crow and a fluttering captive, beside stagnant water amid the decay of a once imperial city; what bitter symbols of all life!

From here there is a view across mud roofs to the famous minaret once used for execution, and the nearby dome of the Kabjān Mosque. The latter still retains its turquoise-coloured tiling, and is at present decorated by five storks' nests perched on the crown and slopes—great black excrescences that give the beautiful cupola a ludicrous air of neglect. Slipping and struggling along through the slimy morass of streets, I finally leave the bazars and reach the little square in front of the Kabjān Mosque; its façade is built on the usual plan, but is entirely divested of mosaic; nothing remains but rough walls of pale umber, above which the blue dome shines faintly, far to the rear across the court, like some abandoned jewel. At one corner of the shabby square, but entirely detached from the mosque, the great minaret, from whose top condemned criminals were until recently hurled to death, rises high in the air against a slowly moving drapery of ashen clouds. It is built of buff brick, tapering sharply from base to top, and is ringed with wide bands formed by diversified patterns in which the bricks are laid. At the top of what might be called its shaft, is a single band of blue tiles; above this

there is an overhanging lantern, pierced by narrow arches and crowned by a series of corbels spreading out like a great capital, on whose centre stands a small pyramid now adorned by a stork's nest. On the third side of the square, is a wide space raised some ten feet above the ground to form a terrace in front of a second mosque. In this and other mosques at Bukhārā, the court is not entered directly as at Samarqand. It is surrounded by a corridor, where the worshipper is obliged—on passing the portal—to turn sharply to right or left until he reaches the corner arcades, which alone open into the court. This particular passage is vaulted with a curiously complicated system of intersecting surfaces, built of brick and carrying very flat domes. In one corner there is a window with tracery, which still retains all its tiles; gorgeous blues with deep yellow flowers, shining like rich enamels.

At no great distance is another small and untidy square, where two dilapidated mosques face one another—pale sepia walls with blue and green mosaics peeling off in pitiful disarray. One of them has kept undamaged an entire panel as beautiful as jewel-work; on a sapphire ground, a pale green vase, with yellow patterns, holds long-stemmed flowers of pale bluish green with orange patches outlined in white. In front of each mosque the ground is raised and paved like a terrace, leaving a broad roadway to enter the bazars at either end of the square. Men in gaudy gowns

and soiled white turbans gather about me when I try to take photographs, deeply interested and altogether mystified by the operation of changing films. One fellow begs to have his photograph taken, but withdraws his request on learning that I cannot instantly hand him the finished picture. Rows of diminutive donkeys stand patiently in front of the terraces; some heavily laden, others for the moment unburdened, but all resigned and listless, with great furry ears slowly moving back and forth above their pathetic heads. Turbaned men are engaged in every kind of occupation, some in the roadway, some leaning against the terrace walls, some walking about on top of it, or even lying down at full length. The entrance to the bazar yawns like the mouth of a gloomy tunnel; above the wall the top of the once-lethal minaret stands out among domes of dun or turquoise.

February 17th

The almost forgotten sun has to-day appeared, shining brightly in a cobalt sky, across which in lazy masses white clouds drift. Things are no longer "no more than what they really are," since the sun has cast over all a magic quite as potent as that of the sorceress who, in old tales, transforms beggars into princelings. Reality is to-day what it was yesterday, but appearances are other. Even the sloughs of mud are less repulsive, while the walls of dried clay are ambered

with light and diversified by shadows, which give relief to what was before monotonous. In this morning play of light and shade, things which yesterday were dead and dreary spring suddenly into light. Pulsing shafts of sun dart through openings in bazar-roofs, and leap from object to object like living creatures. The very shadows are animate, and no longer mere veils of gloom. The costumes which yesterday were masses of bright colour, contrasting harshly with their drab environment, this morning seem harmonised by the golden ambience into which all things melt. Yesterday objects were all on a single plane; this morning in the chequering of shade and sunlight, they have acquired relief and wealth of detail. Men move gaily in brightly-striped costumes with turbans varying in size and degrees of whiteness; or else sit before their shops, with oriental impassivity and placid eyes, gazing fixedly over stately beards often white—like idols robed in shining silk. Boys dash about, and occasionally a rich merchant rides down the bazar on a decent horse, followed by an attendant. Story-tellers stand or squat at crossways, their white turbans either gleaming in the sun, or else palely luminous if they chance to stand in covered places. They recite loudly, hoarsely, and excitedly, with great wealth of gesture; from time to time one or two men seated across the street—apparently followers of the recitant—intone a nasal chant in loud choruses.

To-day when everything has acquired a certain



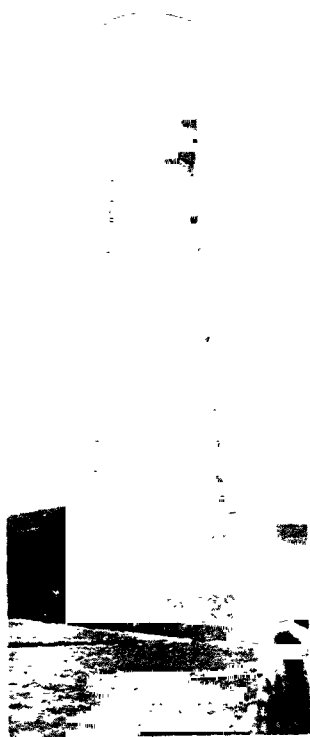
A Prayer Portico and a Hawz, Bukhārā



A Hawz with View of the Kabjān Mosque, Bukhārā

Minaret of the Kabjān Mosque, Bukhārā

This tower was formerly used as a place of execution for criminals, who were hurled from the top



An Entrance to the Bazars, Bukhārā

picturesqueness; when the filth and misery seem transmuted, or at least half-veiled, by the charitable sun which plays just now on Bukhārā,—the city produces a new impression. Even the green tanks hide their foul water beneath bright reflections; whilst the turquoise dome of the Kabjān Mosque, with its deserted storks' nests, fairly glitters in the sun. Nevertheless, to become really curious, a city such as this should be seen in warm or—best of all—hot weather. Then the light seems molten; the air is tremulous with waves of heat; the earth is veiled with buff and gold, while colours flash on every side; everything sordid disappears, as the sun melts all things into a single picture, glowing like splendid enamels fused on a bright gold plaque.

Late in the afternoon the little train carries me from Bukhārā down the branch line to Kagan, where I board the so-called express that is to take me on to Askābād, and thence by carriages over mountain ranges into Persia. The heavy train trails its broad carriages across the plain as night begins to gather. It has fallen, unbroken by light either in the sky or across the plains, when we reach the 'Amū Daryā—the Oxus of antiquity. I can just discern an expanse of dull water, bending suddenly as it passes under the bridge, whose beams and trestles cast a sable tracery across its olive-black surface. Since the days when, a boy at school, I read the sonorous verse of *Sohrab and Rustum*, I have dreamed of how:—

“The sun by this had risen, and clear’d the fog
From the broad Oxus and the glittering sands.”

Here I am, crossing the river that is musical with memories of Arnold’s stately poem, the very river that perhaps halted Alexander of Macedon with all his hosts; yes, crossing it—but in a railway carriage on a modern bridge! How prosaic it all is! nothing but night, dull water, and a Russian train slowly rolling across an iron bridge.

February 18th

Last night the soldier—who in Turkestan accompanies the guard, and makes frequent trips through the corridors on his own account—put his head into my carriage and began to talk volubly. This had happened several times since Moscow; but hitherto, when I had remarked that I knew no Russian, and paid no further attention, they had withdrawn in despair. This time my tactics were ineffectual, and the soldier showed no signs of departing; so I decided that I must discover what he wished. Remembering that the Russian-speaking Frenchman, who had travelled with me as far as Tashkent, had overtaken me at Bukhārā, and was now in one of the forward carriages; I started out to find him, my military escort helping me politely across the open platform as though I were a lady or an old man. When I finally discovered my Frenchman, and he enquired what the

soldier wished, it appeared that the knickerbockers I chanced to be wearing, had made him conclude I must be an English officer. He was therefore much perturbed, and anxious to know by what right and for what purpose I was travelling in Turkestan. When he learned that I was an American duly authorised by Imperial Government, he made one of the deep Russian obeisances that bow the spine in two, and then retired. As the Russians have no great fortresses in these parts, and there is nothing in all Turkestan about which any nation cannot readily inform itself; the elaborate precautions with which their Government hedges the country—not to mention its panicky attitude towards subjects of its ally, England—seem as childish as they are irritating.

It was night when we passed through the ruins of Merv, so I did not have even a fleeting glimpse of one of the most ancient cities of the world; that quondam glory of the East, whose resistance embittered Chingiz Khān so deeply as to provoke order to raze the entire city and slaughter—according to Arab chroniclers—a million of men. I had wished to see it, but the paucity of its ruins and the impossible nature of inns and train-service, as well as inclement weather, caused me to renounce my project. I now half regret my decision since, on waking, the sun shines brightly and the air is soft and warm.

We are now skirting the Russo-Persian frontier, marked by small hillocks and at times a trench—

so close to noble mountains, it seems almost possible to touch them. The plain is dull brown—tinged with madder where it nears the foot-hills, either marbled with olive green where sickly grass grows like immense lichens, or spotted with buff where the earth is overturned. The first line of mountains is considerably lower than those behind; it has round finger-like spurs that seem to grasp the plain (just as roots of giant trees seize the earth) and swelling summits, where the snow glitters in the sun without a break,—a white mantle, faintly glazed with lavender melting into blue-grey shadows. Behind these there rises a loftier range of steep and jagged peaks, which primæval force has graven and rived. Their bare pinnacles, piercing the range with needle-fine points, are very grand. When from time to time a level ridge interrupts the serrated line, snow draws bands of white across the sky; but, in general, on these higher mountains snow only remains in hollows and on gentler slopes. As a whole, the range is silver-grey melting into paler tones of mauve; but it is flecked with blue-white patches of snow, and broken by multiform masses of pale grey shadow warming to lavender—wherever a hollow sinks or some shoulder begins to mount. Formless clouds—milky white with opal tints—overhang the summits, and fade gradually into a colourless sky, slowly turning clear blue as it ascends toward the zenith.

On the other side of the train, the plain stretches

away to the horizon apparently far distant—an endless level of dull siena, faintly tinged with rose-purple where it begins to lose itself in the sky. Not a tree or shrub, not even a bush, is in sight. At long intervals we pass villages, with gateways of sun-dried clay and clay walls, above which a few bare trees and the roofs of clay houses also show. Camels, sheep, and sometimes small horses crop the umber desert. For one moment, a line of pale blue water shimmers in the distance—probably a mirage. At the station of Anan the ruins of an abandoned city lie a few hundred yards away; mud walls, mud houses, an endless number of small round towers of dried mud—dotted about like big pepper-pots—with the ruined portal of a mosque, on a high terrace, looming over everything. Brown walls, brown towers, brown roofs, form a sepia monochrome, whose lines and shattered masses stand out picturesquely against the whiteness of the mountains.

At the railway-stations the Sarths have disappeared, their places being taken by a splendid set of tall slim Turkomen. Some are dressed like those at Bukhārā, but a number have robes of pure red with fine stripes of black. All of them are wearing those enormous sheep-skin bonnets that seem to be a Turkoman's distinctive mark. Most of these are black, but some a reddish brown which makes the owner look as though he had an enormous shock of ruddy hair and no hat; a very few are white. One man is conspicuous by reason

of his red and black stockings, and his mediæval-looking clogs with high heels and thick wooden soles laced over the foot with leather thongs.

It is nearly two o'clock when we reach Askābād. The train has scarcely arrived, when a soldier—despatch in hand—rushes up to my French and Spanish acquaintances, to enquire if they are the persons mentioned in his telegram as travelling to the railway terminus at Krasnovodsk on the Caspian. For some reason, there are no enquiries about me this time. After a little I manage to find the Persian guide, Āghājān, who has been sent from Tīhrān to meet me. He appears to be intelligent and fairly active. To enquiries concerning his origin, he replies that he is by birth a Jew, but hastens to add that he has been to the mission-school, and is now a Christian. It would be interesting to know in what his Christianity consists. The town proves to be entirely modern and fairly clean, with broad streets but no objects of interest. It is, however, less sordid than the generality of such places, and is rendered almost beautiful by the cold purity of a blue-white mountain range, so near the city it seems peering into it. The hotel is—for Turkestan—quite a cleanly and palatial place.

Shortly after arriving, Āghājān takes me to see the Persian Consul, whose visa on passports is required when entering Persia. He proves pleasant, civil, and quite the most hospitable person that I have met in some time. Coffee is served

while my passport is being stamped, and I have scarcely reached the hotel, when he calls to leave a card inviting me to tea. His wife and sister-in-law are Albanians, and at tea we all converse in French. The Consul's polite manner scarcely conceals his dislike of Russia and the vexatious policy here employed. After tea is over, and a cordial invitation to dinner the next day has been extended to me, I start out to arrange for transport to Mashhad. The Persian carriage-proprietor is an emaciated old robber with a sallow birdlike face, who wears a long coat of lemon-coloured skin flung across his shoulders. After a great deal of haggling, I strike a bargain for two carriages—if they can be called such; a battered landau, in the last stages of decay, is to carry Said, Aghājān, and myself, over the mountains, I hope safely; all that is left of a brougham, with a faded lining of red and yellow stripes, is to transport my luggage. We are to travel post, that is to say with relays of horses maintained by Government—in Persia a polite fiction. However, I cannot start until day after to-morrow, as the post leaves to-morrow and takes all the horses. The price agreed on is very high, and it is more than probable that I am being roundly robbed, despite the governmental tariff regulating the rates, which I am shown. Be this as it may, the proprietor in making change, tries to cheat me out of a twenty-rouble note—for of course I am obliged to pay in advance. There is no doubt that my

vigilance will have to be unceasing, if I do not wish to be enmeshed by the proverbial dishonesty of Persia.

After this I have to visit the money-changer, in order to exchange a hundred Russian roubles for Persian coin. Both gold and note are practically unknown in Persia; in the larger cities the different branches of the Imperial Bank of Persia—an institution under English control—issues bank-notes, which are good only in the place of issue. Here in Askābād, the only currency is silver in two *qirān* pieces, worth about one franc of French money, but double the size of that coin. After Āghājān has sorted them out with great vigour, rejecting the pierced ones and biting others to make sure they are not lead; two hundred and eighty-six of these pieces are tied up in a little bag of burlap and carted off, weighing heaven knows how much. It makes one feel like a paymaster-general starting on his rounds.

February 19th

Last night I was aroused by a tremendous noise of drum and fife, playing in oriental time. Although the rhythm was eastern, it proved to be a wedding-party dressed in European clothes. A number of men, carrying lighted candles, preceded the bride wearing a white gown and veil; she walked between a man (presumably the groom) attired in a full dress-suit and an overcoat thrown

over his shoulders, and a youth with a student cap. Women with white scarfs thrown over their heads completed the group. Every few minutes all of them stopped to shout and form a circle whilst two men danced a sort of *cancan*, which appeared to bore the bride and groom hugely; then they advanced a little further and repeated this same procedure—the drum beating away and the oriental flute burbling furiously all the while.

Here at Askābād the police authorities place such difficulty in the path of foreigners, as seem vexatious even to those inured to the ways of Russian officialdom. When Āghājān reported himself on arriving, he was cheerfully informed that, should the traveller for whom he expected to act as guide, prove to be English,—he and his master would on no account be permitted to cross into Persia.—In these parts it is rather humorous to recall the fact that both Russia and Great Britain belong to the Triple Entente.—As soon as I arrived, I sent my passports to the authorities, requesting that they might be returned at once with the visa without which no one can leave Russia. This realm of the Tsar resembles a prison, in so much as it can neither be entered nor left without due process of law. When I returned to the hotel about seven o'clock last night, I found an officer waiting to see me about my passports,—police duty being in military hands here in Turkestan. He was a stocky individual, with a comfortable rotundity tightly buttoned up inside

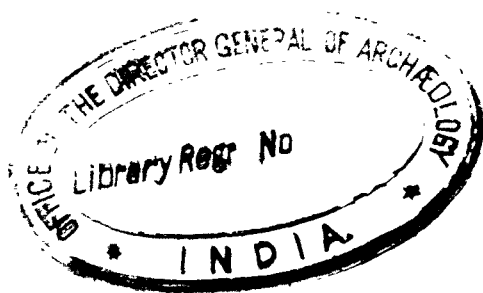
a military great-coat. As there was no other place in which to receive this troublesome but potent individual, I had to see him in my bedroom. Here, in addition to the passports he already held, I produced my letter from the Russian Ambassador and a copy of the verbal (for they refuse to give a written) communication made by Imperial Government to the Embassy at Petersburg, granting me permission to visit specified places in specified order—all liberty of movement being denied foreigners so annoying as to wish to travel through Turkestan. Since my official visitor was unable to speak anything but his own tongue, of which I know nothing, Āghājān had to use his limited stock of Russian and interpret for me; whereupon a veritable inquisition took place. I was asked: where I came from; why I wished to enter Persia; who was my employer; if I had none, what *was* I doing in Turkestan; did I own a house in my native city; what was my income, and how acquired; and many other idle and vexatious questions. As my fate lay in the hands of this rotund official spider, it was necessary to be extremely polite; yet I thought it wise that my manner should, at the same time, betray resentment of the more impertinent of his questions. After ending my interrogatory, he gathered up all my papers, declared he must take them to headquarters for inspection, and marched off—smoking one of my cigarettes. A little later, a telephone message arrived, to the effect that my papers would be

kept overnight, and I must call for them in person next morning. To stir without passports properly viséd would be impossible, as, even if I managed to leave the city, I should inevitably be detained at the frontier. These fussy formalities, and a consciousness of how helpless one is in the hands of these autocratic persons, aroused very unpleasant sensations. The possibility of being obliged to proceed to Krasnovodsk on the Caspian, or even to return to Moscow, was not pleasant to consider. Fortunately the authorities telephoned this morning, to say that I need not come to headquarters myself, and handed over my passports duly viséd to Āghājān. However, I still suspect that without the Russian Ambassador's letter of recommendation, I might have been refused permission to enter Persia; at any rate, I know that I shall be delighted, when once I have crossed the frontier out of reach of further formalities.

My official difficulties being now at an end, I feel free to make a few necessary purchases. Āghājān tells me that in all the shops they are astonished to hear me speak a language not Russian, and immediately enquire who I am, where I come from, and what language I am using. At a half after two, I arrive at the house of the hospitable Persian Consul, but it is nearly three o'clock when we sit down to a long and excellent dinner. The meal is scarcely ended, when tea and sweets are served. Wherever the Consul goes, he is fol-

lowed by a very smart Persian Cossack, wearing a grey astrakhan bonnet and a great-coat cut like that of the Russian Cossacks, but in colour a beautiful ruby red, with a white scarf draped between the shoulders. Before I leave, the Consul is kind enough to give me a letter to a friend, one of the Persian generals at Mashhad. I have never been received with greater courtesy, and certainly have never had such hospitality extended to me by a stranger who knew nothing about me.

II
ASKĀBĀD TO MASHHAD



II

ASKĀBĀD TO MASHHAD

February 20th

AN overcast and threatening day. I wished to start at eight o'clock; but Persians having no idea of punctuality, the carriages are over an hour late in arriving. Then there is further delay in loading the luggage, and stowing parts of my kit in convenient places. Since Persian drivers do not inspire confidence, I order the dilapidated brougham, filled with luggage, to lead the way, so it cannot get out of sight. Finally the two wrecks, each with four horses harnessed abreast, succeed in starting. In such ramshackle old conveyances, driven by such strange and shabby creatures, I have never before travelled; while the dirty white Turkoman's bonnet worn by my driver only makes the procession more ludicrous.

On leaving Askābād, the road crosses a barren plain, beyond which the mountains are completely hidden in mist—a very dreary prospect indeed; then it begins to ascend the lower slopes in long loops, under a heavy drizzle that soon turns to fine rain. The only living things in sight are

flocks of sheep grazing wearily. Occasionally we pass a rude wagon painted red, with sloping sides and a rounded canvas hood—rather like the “prairie schooners,” which in earliest days were used to cross our plains in search of the new found gold. Sometimes we cross convoys of mules laden with merchandise; at the first place where we halt to breathe our sorry horses, there is a caravan of some thirty camels, still loaded but kneeling and eating slowly, while their drivers sit around the fire. When we have passed a man flaying a scarcely dead camel beside the road, we meet a train of wagons carrying cotton from Mashhad, with drivers in shaggy bonnets, and Russian soldiers at front and rear accompanying them from the frontier to collect customs-duties at Askābād.

At noon we halt at a filthy caravanserai to change horses and permit me to lunch. Dingy white buildings of one storey surround a courtyard full of mud and manure; wrapped up in my overcoat, I am sitting in a small room—bare and dirty—with two stoves that cannot be lighted. Outside, rain falls intermittently and grey mist hangs a pall over everything. Sheep and a few lambs, some newly born, stand about the slimy court. A camel is fastened under a shed, solemnly chewing with flabby lips, while moving his great head slowly from side to side, with an air of disdain words cannot render. He is the image of a contented indifference, no power could perturb. From time to time cocks crow or a hen clucks

loudly; but the lamentable crying of sheep is uninterrupted. Despite these noises, I am vaguely conscious of that hush which always falls when mist muffles the air and makes all sounds remote and ominous. A dog pads about the muddy enclosure and chickens parade the shed-roofs, over which little birds or a chance magpie sometimes flutter. The hills rise sheer, directly behind the caravanseraï—dirty brown with scaly patches of green. A few horses lazily crop a ridge, while the flock of sheep that just now filled the courtyard, slowly undulates up the hillside—most of them dust-coloured, but some black, with here and there one rusty brown. Herdsmen in huge bonnets lean on their staves, conversing. The rain has ceased, but—a few hundred yards away—mist has drawn a veil across the valley, hiding all the hills except a few pallid flakes of snow seen through the fringe of vapour. Desolation and melancholy reign unalleviated.

When we start with fresh horses, the road begins to rise more steeply, for the first time winding upward in great loops. Nothing is visible but brown and desolate hills with snow in every depression, and grey mist wavering below the invisible summits. A few tiny shrubs—entirely bare—form the only vegetation, each coated with ice until it stands out in transparent silver. Gradually the snow grows deeper and wider-spread, until earth strewn with heaps of snow, is replaced by snow broken by patches of earth. In some

places a bank, running with liquid mud and rills of water, overhangs the road-bed. Bending over these banks, or clinging to steep hillsides, or piercing level fields of snow, large bushes begin to show above the clumps of dwarfed shrub. They too are leafless and sheathed in pearly ice, their twisted crystal branches looking so fantastic, they seem the work of silversmiths rather than of nature. This ice-decked shrubbery is the one thing which lends a touch of grace to so morose an ascent.

When sitting in the carriage grows wearisome, I start to tramp up the roadway, filled with orange mud trickling with water, and banked by piles of snow on either side. Suddenly a distant tinkling—like that of Alpine cow-bells—floats through the greyness, drawing steadily nearer, until a camel's snaky head emerges from the mist, as though through a curtain, followed by another and still other camels. It is a caravan bringing cotton from Sabzawār to Askābād. The huge ungainly beasts march by with a slow sure swing; their shaggy eyebrows, their snouts, and the long hair hanging from their arched necks, hoary with particles of congealed moisture—glittering feebly like powdered pearl. They are laden with a bale of cotton placed on each side of the rude pack-saddles. The knotted ends of their halter ropes stand up, sparkling with frost like jewelled tassels, between their dark indifferent eyes, out of which they peer with a near-sighted squint, as

their incredible heads swing slowly from side to side. A tinkling bell, in shape and tone like Swiss cow-bells, is attached to the halter on each side of the head, whilst a third is hung about the neck. The dun-coloured camels pad past me, fastened together by ropes in groups of from five to ten. Each group is escorted by a ragged driver, and has a huge bell—a foot or more high—fastened to the leader's saddle, where, above the tinkling rhythm of halter bells, it booms and clangs. To caravans I have grown accustomed in Barbary, but there they are soundless; so this is the first time I have ever heard that music of the camel bells, which so deeply impressed the imagination of Sir Richard Burton.

As we climb through mist and chill, group after group passes slowly by, with deliberate tread and a strange craning to right and left of their long curved necks, on which the head seems to sway like that of a monstrous serpent. Suddenly above the jangle of the caravan beside and below us, I catch the faint tinkling of more distant bells; looking upward I can just perceive a ghostly line of camels moving vaguely through the mist on a loop in the road far above. For over half an hour they file past, accompanied by miserable drivers; their great bales rocking slowly, with here and there a tuft of white cotton bursting through the canvas. A more fantastic sight than this endless procession of over three hundred camels, linked in groups, slowly padding down

the mountain through snow and vapour, to the booming of brazen bells, would be difficult to conceive. It seems a version, curiously transposed to the Orient, of Goethe's:—

“Kennst du den Berg und seinen Wolkensteg?
 Das Maultier sucht im Nebel seinen Weg: . . .
 Kennst du ihn wohl?—Dahin! Dahin
 Geht unser Weg!”

Gradually the caravan draws to an end, passing indifferently by the body of a brother camel who died in his tracks; until the entire train disappears in the mist, with a Russian soldier bringing up the rear. Then the sound of bells grows ever fainter, fading to an ethereal echo that itself finally dies. After that, the only sounds are of wheels crunching through the snow, or of my drivers as they call or whistle to encourage their struggling horses; even these noises are deadened by the fog, which—only a few feet away—encloses us with wavering veils seemingly drawn to hide a world of mystery.

By mid-afternoon, we have reached an altitude of some four thousand feet above Askābād. The mist now begins to lift, revealing hills draped with snow. Overhead a bright wanness appears, where the sun struggles to pierce the fog but only turns the vapour from grey to shining white. For one second, a faint line of blue appears through a rift in the drifting mist. At a little after four, we reach the Russian frontier—a series of enclosures



A Group of Bukhāriāts



Turkmen at a Station near Askābād

This photograph was taken while hiding behind the door of the railway carriage, as the use of a camera is strictly forbidden in Turkestan



Bājirān at Sunrise



A Persian Chai Khānā, or Tea-House, Askābād to Masshad

between walls of clay, with a few low whitewashed houses. Soldiers are standing about with long iron rods, used to prod carts and bales in search of contraband; finally the officials come out and take my passports to be inspected. My drivers go off for tea, and Āghājān to buy meat for to-night's meal, while I remain watching the dreary road. Several carriages pass by, filled with Persians and veiled women, all of whom peer at me even more curiously than I at them. At last my papers are returned and we are free to start. It is really a great relief to have crossed the frontier and know that, whatever trials I may encounter in Persia, at least I shall no longer be harrassed by the mediæval formalities of official Russia.

The ascent becomes more arduous, as the road twists upward in sharper and more numerous loops, with clouds now hanging high enough to leave the hills visible (except for occasional rocky peaks) all white with snow. When we have almost reached five thousand feet above our starting point, the road makes a sudden turn, and then plunges down with precipitous turns, affording a first glimpse of Persia spread out before me in a panorama of the most unusual beauty. Rosy clouds flaming over the summits, are what first catch the sight. Close at hand, the snowy ridge separating us from the northern slope just ascended, still catches all that is left of fog and clouds—long rows of blue-grey vapour fraying out at the upper edge, until they drift northward across the ridge,

or else swirl upward in tongues that melt insensibly into the now darkening vaults of azure. Below me, the valley lies free from fog at the foot of hills greater and smaller, rising one above the other in rows powdered with snow. The highest range ends in peaks of serrated rock, in colour dun glazed with rose and flecked with multitudinous small spots of black. The swelling slopes of the lower hills are seamed by ridges and gullies, wrought by rain and snow descending through untold eons. Although without vegetation, they are not of rock but of loam, yellow turning to olive, acrid and metallic as though coated with mineral deposits. Snow remains in depressions or on more sheltered summits, its enamelled white contrasting with the sharp hues of the earth. In a hollow at the centre of this vast cirque of hills, Bājīrān nestles—an assemblage of one-storeyed houses built of clay the same colour as the hills. Far off across the valley, snow-peaks dominate the scene, jagged point towering above jagged point. Banks of aquamarine mist have been caught upon their bases, whence detached masses float upwards across the flanks, until they crown the summits, which the rays of a now invisible sun flush with pale but luminous tones of scarlet lake tinged with mauve and lavender. Words cannot depict these radiant summits, blazing as though rosy flame were thrown out from within; nor can they describe how the entire landscape glitters, while the nearby mist curls northward and is lost in the

darkening sky. Casting her veils aside, Irān lies before me glowing in the rosy hue of the sunset.¹

The carriages plunge rattling down the hill and around corners, until, on reaching the village at dusk, we turn into the muddy court of a caravan-serai. While waiting for my luggage to be unloaded (since if left in the carriage overnight, everything would be stolen before dawn) the sky changes gradually. Near the horizon it grows violet, very deep yet so luminous the eye seems to see far through the purpling air, the which, as it mounts, turns sapphire strewn with the pale gold points of early stars. Here I see my first Persian costumes—very commonplace affairs indeed. A long under-garment, falling well below the knees, is so crossed as to leave a V-shaped space descending from the shirt-band to the sash, which holds the clothes in place. Over this is worn an equally long coat, tightly fitted to the bust, but with full skirts gathered into large pleats at the back. The hats are high and shaped like melons, made either of black felt, or of blue cloth with silver lines and stars. The Persian's distinctive mark—two long locks—curl from under them out over the ears, the rest of the head being clean shaved.

While standing in the court, I suddenly hear someone address me in French; looking round, I

¹ I record my impressions as they occurred; but candour compels the admission that Persia never again offered me anything one half so lovely as this first illusion.

find that a well-dressed young Persian is inviting me to wait in the room he occupies. When he discovers that I speak English, he begins to use it easily and correctly. He is a native of Mashhad, who has lived in Shanghai and is now, after a visit to his parents, on his way back to Manchester! He offers me sweets, and shows extreme courtesy in all his ways. Finally Āghājān finishes carrying the luggage into a bare but tolerably clean room, rather like an anchorite's cell, where Saïd proceeds to set up my camp-bed, and adroitly make things as comfortable as possible. The samovar purchased at Askābād is soon lighted, and after a time Āghājān brings me the mutton bought at the frontier, decently cooked on a skewer. A hungry little dog shoves the door open with his nose, and shares my dinner. Later my young Persian, who with his travelling companions occupies the next room, sends to enquire if he may pay me a visit. He apologizes for not having asked me to wait in his room as soon as I arrived, excusing himself on the ground that he took me for a Russian, and of course desired no intercourse with that race. He tells me that the Russians foment disturbances in Persia, in order to have pretexts for sending troops into the country; and dwells on the way they violated the sanctuary and killed Persians at Mashhad. He insists that all his fellow-countrymen hate Russia. His manners are remarkable, and his courteous proffer of service obviously sincere. When he leaves, all

is still outside; through the broken panes of my single window, I see a hillside like a wall of white, its bare crest tracing a bar across the chill heavens a-glitter with stars.

February 21st

At six o'clock, before the sun is up, it is bitterly cold in my room—there being no way to make a fire. The light increases slowly, until the sun brings in a brilliant day. My Persian acquaintance is on hand to bid me good-bye, and regret that he has not been able to do more for me. It is nearly eight o'clock when we drive away from Bājīrān, crouched among its yellow hills and towering peaks. On reaching the valley-end, the road begins winding sharply upward. At first the hills are bare, with only a few patches of snow; then it grows deeper. As sitting still in the carriage is chilly work, I walk briskly, invigorated by the clear cold and the glittering sunlight. The hills are mantled with snow and dotted with evergreens, when, on reaching a height of some six thousand feet above the sea, we begin a long descent into another valley. At the bottom we find a camel with a broken leg lying beside the road; a vermilion stream meanders through white snow, where the driver—after roping its head back—is trying to cut the poor brute's throat with a tiny pen-knife. As this means a lingering death after hours of agony, I cannot bear to leave the creature to its fate. Through Āghājān, I enquire if the

driver would not like to have me save him trouble by shooting the camel; my proposition being refused, I next offer a rouble (to him a large sum) if he permits me to have the animal put out of its misery. When this has also been refused, I try to discover the man's motives. I am told that he wants to use the hide and does not wish it spoiled; whereupon I suggest that a bullet-hole will injure it far less than hacking it with a pen-knife. Probably the real reason is that the man is a Muslim and wishes to eat the flesh, which a true-believer may not do, unless the animal has had its throat cut. This, however, has been done already, and I am determined to save the animal from torture; so I add threats—which I could never execute—to offers of money, and finally secure the obstinate Muhammadan's consent to a foreigner's folly. Then Saïd takes his pistol, and the poor writhing head falls motionless on the snow.

The carriages have been waiting a short way up the road, which now ascends another mountain. I plunge along after them, through deep snow, until weary. At the top, a wonderful view is spread before us; we have halted on a long ridge, down whose slopes the road twists in giant loops. Directly opposite, a sheer wall of mountains rises, entirely covered with snow, except where a few blackish rocks pierce the white, or a row of ever-greens runs along the crest. Other hills heave up their dazzling white flanks, strewn with round and

tapering evergreens, each one sharply detached in black against the snow. Far away, behind other ranges, a majestic chain glittering with snow, towers over all—its long spurs all running downward like glaciers. In the clear air they seem near at hand, yet in their aloofness most remote. As we descend, the hills we pass are almost bare of snow—rocky slopes of yellow touched with purple. The sky is pale but intensely blue, broken only where wisps of cloud catch on the mountain crests and then drift across, melting in the radiant air. A falcon poises in the vault above us, before swooping on outspread pinions; saucy magpies with green iridescence on black wings, flit from rock to rock, jauntily wagging their very long tails; flocks of pigeons wing down the valley below. A lark-like song floats upward from an unseen bird.

After descending some seven hundred feet, we reach a relay about noon; just a stable and a *chai khāna* or tea-house—hovels built of dried clay. The four corners of the tea-house floor are occupied by terraces of dried earth, on which men can squat or sleep, leaving only a cruciform passage between them. I can see a rude oven in the dim light, only admitted through the door. Three shabby Persians are gathered around a samovar, drinking tiny glasses of tea, and also busy watching me. After the least filthy of the platforms has been swept with a besom, I perch on the edge, whilst making a scanty lunch on provisions I

fortunately brought with me. There is no doubt that in Persia, God helps him who helps himself, since no one else will. When we start, the road passes through a narrow gorge of tawny rock, where jagged teeth project in rows. Then the valley expands, and the road begins to wind across the level, between low pointed hills, sometimes snow-tipped, sometimes almost bare. A stream wanders by, often choosing the roadway for its bed. We pass a few mud villages, a caravanserai, and some fields enclosed by mud walls. There are rows of slender poplars here and there, with greenish white boles and fine branches all pointing upward, as though the whole tree were one gigantic bough. . . . The first carriage we have seen, is coming towards us. In Persia the rule of the road requires travellers to change post-horses when they cross, taking them back to the relay where they belong; so we halt to exchange teams. It takes some ten minutes to adjust the assemblage of string and rotten leather that here passes as harness; then we move along with our underfed and over-worked animals.

The next relay is at Imām Quli;—across a wide space, half road and half river, a fortified wall (like all Persia built of sun-dried clay) surrounds tiers of clay hovels, climbing an ochre hill streaked with snow. There are no windows to be seen; only a few houses have curious rows of holes, which make them look like dove-cotes. A round

watch-tower stands at the highest point of the village; two others are visible further down. The arches and flat dome of a mosque show above the roofs. Everything in sight being built with dried clay, only their form distinguishes the buildings from the earth. Cows and camels stray across the road, where a few men idle in yellow leather overcoats called—I believe—*pushtins*. The hum of strident voices and a child's occasional shout, float across from the village. . . . It is three o'clock when we leave, and the sun has begun to decline visibly. There were not enough horses, so we only have three to drag the carriage full of luggage. The road leads up a steep hillside with sharp bends, on which the snow often lies so deep, the poor horses can scarcely make the turn. At last we reach a wide plateau buried under a glittering expanse of snow, that undulates until barred by distant mountains. This table-land is itself so high, and the mountains so near, they seem, rather than mountains, dunes of ice, or waves of some cosmic sea congealed in the dawn when first our world began. Curiously enough they suggest motion, despite their solid immobility. Far behind, across the invisible valley which separates them from the plateau, the view is closed by lion-coloured peaks powdered with snow. The sun is now sinking toward these jagged crests, as it flings long shadows down their flanks.

The poor horses have the utmost difficulty in

dragging the carriages through the snow, in ruts often a foot or more deep. All of us—drivers, Āghājān, Saïd, and myself—plod along on foot, hauling our legs out of deep snow as best we can. It is pitiful to watch the horses straining, and see how their sides quiver and their legs tremble, whenever they are forced to stop—which is, at most, every hundred yards. Slowly we toil across the plain, the sun sinking swiftly all the while. The peaks ahead of us have begun to cast long shadows, creeping slowly toward us, whilst the hills behind grow rosy. Finally we reach the further side of the plateau, only to realise that the worst is yet before us. We must cross the chain of mountains that rear a wall before us, by a road ascending precipitously in four great loops. It is a horrid prospect and my heart aches for the horses, yet there is nothing to do but go on. They start up the purgatorial ascent, struggling on through deep snow a few yards at a time; then halt with harried nostrils, panting and steaming,—whilst I recall Blake's vision of the infernal cliffs up which Vergil and Dante clomb. Little by little they advance with real suffering, which fills me with distress and anxiety lest their strength fail before the top.

When the poor beasts reach the final stretch, I walk ahead to the summit—over six thousand feet above sea level—where it is possible to look down both slopes. Ahead of me the sun has just touched the snowy crests, whose spreading flanks are al-



Imām Qulī



Late Afternoon on the Uplands above Imām Qulī
(The horses were so exhausted they had to rest every hundred yards)



A Kabyle in Persia: Said in the Snow



"A Lodging for a Night"
(This is the room with jars for "The Forty Thieves")

ready veiled by indigo shadows, except where the last rays still lie on the valley-edge. Looking backward, the sky directly over the mountains is faintly bluish green changing to lavender, which in turn melts into the deeper blues of the zenith. The amber hills flush, then gradually grow pale and lustreless, as the sun descends behind the snow mountains, which now fade from greenish white to dull grey. . . . The silence which lies upon these lonely hills shrouded in snow, is suddenly broken by the creaking of a vehicle, climbing the slope I am waiting to descend. After a little, I can see the post-waggon moving slowly upward through the twilight. It is a rude uncovered affair, like a small hay-wain, filled with sacks of mail on which a few passengers are perched. When it reaches the top, I make signs for it to halt, since it cannot possibly pass my carriages further down, and there is no knowing what might have happened, had I not chanced to be here. Not hearing any sound from my horses, I start back—only to find one of the poor beasts off the road, floundering in snow up to his belly; while the four men cling desperately to the rear wheels, in order to keep the carriage from plunging down the precipitous mountain-side, and dashing to pieces at the bottom among mangled horses. Running back to the summit as quickly as the snow will permit, I send men and a horse from the post-waggon down to the rescue. They succeed in extricating my animal; then with the

help of the extra horse and of much pushing at rear wheels, at last haul the two carriages to the top. It is not pleasant to think what my predicament might have been, had the post not arrived so opportunely.

It is six o'clock when we start down, so there is no hope of reaching Kuchān—my intended stopping place—to-night. Dusk now lies across the hills; as we move downward through a dim world of shadowy blue, the impression received is not so much of sunlight withdrawn, as of all life and light slowly dying. Darkness, cold, and solitude, on a snow-clad mountain crest; it is a dreary almost sinister hour, recalling all the sorrows one may have ever known. As night falls, stars begin to peer from the darkling sky; whilst, without a light, we wind down what must be a road, swaying close to the invisible edge, over which we may at any moment crash. When the level is reached, we flounder through the darkness past two caravanserais, where camels resting on folded legs, are vaguely visible by the smoky light of fires, around which drivers huddle; then, after what seems hours, reach a relay where we are benighted.

A more loathsome place in which to lodge, would be hard to find. After looking at various sties on different sides of a boggy court, each worse than the other, and then falling up a half wall, half stairway, in the dark, I chose the room where I am now writing, after it had been evacuated

by a number of hags and bawling brats. It may be ten by fifteen feet, with a dirt floor and a mud roof. Queer niches are scooped in clay walls black with soot. My camp-bed has been pitched as far as possible from the walls, and my luggage piled in a corner. Not daring to investigate the filth in dark corners, I huddle in the middle of the bed, realising how people used to feel when they "drew the skirts of their robes about them." The only light is that of candles brought with me, and a fire of green logs blazing on the primitive hearth. This fire may sound delightful, but is not, since it pours all its smoke into the room; I am shivering with cold in the midst of a thick and acrid fog, which chokes me and fills my eyes with rheum. At one end of this agreeable lodging I can just distinguish three enormous jars—presumably for oil—so precisely like those in which "The Forty Thieves" were hid as to startle me with a sensation of meeting unexpectedly things known long ago. No food of any sort can be bought, borrowed, or stolen. The tins brought from Askābād—in dim prevision of what lay before me—prove a horrid mess; so I am reduced to bread, and remnants of dates and chocolate, cheered by tea made in my precious samovar. The only thing between me and despair is a sense of humour, aided by Saïd's ungrumbling service and appreciation of the comic. Undressing is an impossibility in this sty, so there is nothing to do but go to bed fully clothed.

February 22nd

About one o'clock last night, I was roused by the tinkling of camel-bells.

"Behold, the driver has risen and made ready his files of camels,
And begged us to acquit him of blame: why, O travellers, are you asleep?
These sounds before and behind are the din of departure and of the camel-bells;
With each moment a soul and a spirit is setting off into the Void."

It must have been a large caravan, since it took a long time for the sound to pass and die. The road being at some distance, the jangling of bells was subdued to a plaintive rhythm—very strange to hear late at night when suddenly awakened in my hovel, with its Ali Baba jars dimly visible in the wanness of fore-dawn. They are large enough to hold a man easily, and to see one emerge from them would scarcely have surprised me, so fitting would it have seemed. The night was bitterly cold, and even fully dressed, with rugs and coats piled over me, I had to pull the sheet over my benumbed head and draw up my knees, until I lay in a shivering ball that longed for home. After that I was twice wakened by voices calling a Husayn who appeared loath to rise, for which I could scarcely blame him. This name—commemorating Karbalā's martyr—shouted through the night, made me realise that at last I was really

in the land of Shī'a, which books describe in so alluring a fashion.

Poor Saïd could find no possible place in which to lodge, so was obliged to spend the entire night in one of the carriages, trying not to freeze to death. As the cold made sleep impossible, he lit the stump of a candle, fixed it on the opposite seat, and attempted to ward off insanity by studying his English grammar until one o'clock. I take my hat off to the resource, endurance, and good temper of Kabyles.

My toilet, in the bitter greyness before sun-up, is hasty and summary. The coachmen are as usual late, and I begin to fear that Āghājān will be of little use in dealing with them. The carriage wheels have frozen to the ruts and have to be chopped out with an axe; so it is seven-thirty before we are able to start. After rattling down the turns of a hillside track, over whose edge it would at any moment be easy to slip, we come in sight of a wide plain covered with snow, stretching away until it touches a mighty range of snow mountains, congealed in one vast agitation of white. This chain is really divided into two, of which the more remote is so pallid and of so shimmering a blue-white as to seem vision rather than reality. Taking our way across the plain, we find it interspersed with long stretches of mud, growing more and more numerous as the snow melts and then disappears,—which makes me realise the true meaning of those lines:

"Like Snow upon the Desert's dusty Face
[Lighting a little hour or two.]"

There is no such thing as a road, just a collection of ruts—at first frozen, then extremely boggy—which wander in desultory fashion across the level ground. The carriage sinks deep, creaking and swaying with the jerky pull of the exhausted horses. Every few minutes, it seems as though the ramshackle vehicle must fall in pieces, or a poor horse succumb. So detestable a carriage-way I have never seen before, and should like never to see again;—but I fear Persia has many similar surprises for unsuspecting travellers.

From time to time we pass through villages with windowless houses of sun-dried clay, so low and small they appear a child's plaything. On the corners of terraced roofs, white dogs bask in the sun and then leap to their feet, barking angrily as we rattle past; while a few long-robed men lounge about, with their blue mitre-like bonnets pushed off their shaven foreheads. Now we are overtaking a string of camels and *fourgons*—as the rude waggons are here called—laden with sugar-bales and oil-tins. They are escorted by Persian soldiers, mounted and heavily armed, one of whom wears a complete cuirass of six rows of cartridges. It appears that the convoy has been caught while attempting to smuggle ammunition, which is contraband in Persia; and is now being led to judgment and probably confiscation. A little

after eleven o'clock we arrive at Kuchān, having covered only three and a half *farsakhs*. The *farsakh* is a measure, devised to torture travellers who venture into Persia. It is supposed to represent the distance a loaded mule can travel in one hour, and is generally considered the equivalent of four English miles. In reality, it varies wilfully between three and six or seven miles. Whenever the driver has—through his interpreter—assured the weary traveller he has only a “little *farsakh*” to go, he may be certain that his goal lies miles away. In fact, the word has already grown so hateful, the mere sound of it now plunges me in nightmares to which the labours of Tantalus seem light.

Kuchān is still a considerable place, outside whose walls a mighty sovereign was, in the eighteenth century, slain by his own soldiers;—that Nādir Qulī Khān known as Nādir Shāh, who from a robber-chief grew to be lord of Persia; a resistless conqueror memorable as the man who swept across the East, sacked imperial Delhi, and carried off the untold treasure of the Great Moghāl, only to end his reign in ferocious excess, and fall by an assassin's stroke while besieging an obscure town in Khurāsān. . . . I have decided to stay the night here, though it is not yet mid-day; not out of admiration for Nādir Shāh, but simply because I am not willing, in my soiled and weary condition, to risk another lodging like last night's. Compared with that, I am housed in a palace; this

means that I have secured, and made Aghājān sweep, a small empty room with sooty walls once whitewashed. It boasts a stove, that may perhaps smoke a little less than the so-called fire-places. A rickety table has been produced, whose dirt is hidden by a piece of red cotton bought at a nearby shop. This splendid room looks out on a sodden courtyard but mildly odoriferous, where a few battered carriages are standing; cows and sheep stroll about placidly, and dogs fly yelping from the vindictive onslaughts of a small boy. Over the mud walls, two clumps of green-gold poplars stand out against the sky of tender blue, above which a few nacre-tinted clouds drift slowly. In the portico outside my room, a small Persian child is pecking at me, while two adolescents are walking up and down, trying to appear unconcerned, but really eager to watch the *fīrangī* with all his queer belongings. A Russian soldier has just strolled into the manury courtyard, and several more are in the streets outside.

The town—which is fairly large—comprises two principal streets, intersecting in the *maidān* or square, where a market is being held at present. These streets are lined by booths protected by a continuous shed carried on wooden poles. Here I see for the first time those turbans of vivid grass-green, which the Shi'ite followers of 'Alī affect. Many of the men have a curiously ferocious air, thanks to their extraordinary beards dyed rust-red with henna. The natural colour, black or

dirty grey, generally shows in lines of varying width, where the hair has grown out since last dyed, giving the wearer a most unkempt appearance. These flaming beards suggest Herodes Antipas, and a barbaric artificiality strangely out of keeping with the shabby Persians of to-day. The inhabitants of Kuchān also wear socks elaborately woven in flowered patterns, that make their feet conspicuous when they walk away in heelless slippers. Most of the shops are devoted to the sale of sweets, and have sticks of spar-like sugar-candy in huge bowls awaiting customers. Another speciality is wheat bread—the only kind known in Persia—baked in enormous cakes no thicker than a knife-blade, and full of bulby inequalities, looking rather like huge pancakes much undercooked. They are exposed for sale on dirty rugs thrown over inclined planes near the ovens. I ate some of this bread for the first time at luncheon, and found it not unpalatable. At street corners, vendors are seated beside large bowls filled with a thick brew of rice or flour, surrounded by spoons and smaller bowls set on trays to tempt the hungry. At both ends of the main street there are glimpses of snow-mountains, which relieve the sordidness of this shabby town.

Strolling through Kuchān, I find myself haunted by Thackeray's disillusioned phrase: "We arrive at places now, but we travel no more." To be well-informed has certainly its disadvantage, in so much as it destroys that element of surprise

which must have given to travel in old days a zest we moderns shall never know. We have read and heard so much about foreign parts, photographs and illustrations have depicted their peculiarities so accurately, that when we suddenly find ourselves face to face with reality—however remote—it has lost its novelty. All this ineluctably exposes us to a disillusion, from which only a few of the world's most perfect shrines are still exempt. Walking up and down the streets of this dreary town, the general effect really does not differ from that of similar places in other lands; while the characteristic and to me novel details seem a matter of course, so familiar have books and pictures made them. Alas! no country can ever compare with that land which great writers depict; and the endeavour to see the reality behind the glorious image evoked by their magic is no doubt a folly. I am certain that Nīshāpūr will never stir me as does the collocation of its name in:—

“Whether at Naishápūr or Babylon,
Whether the Cup with sweet or bitter run. . . .”

To add to this vague discontent, a troop of some fifty Russian soldiers rides down the street. Their presence angers me in a place where they have no right other than that of brute force; yet this sentiment is futile, since this is only an instance of the law that the strong shall devour the weak, which,

from microbes to men, rules the ravening universe created by all-merciful Providence.

February 23rd

At seven o'clock I am ready to leave, but there is no sign of the carriages ordered to be ready at this hour. My peerless henchman, Āghājān, has about as much vigour as a piece of boiled macaroni set on end; no amount of threats and scolding can instill into him enough courage to cope with those impossible animals called, in Persia, drivers. After gazing down the empty street for a fretful half-hour, I make it so unpleasant that he prefers to go in search of the carriages, which finally appear at eight o'clock. The road is the same kind of bog through which we toiled yesterday—exhausting to the horses, and very shattering to the nerves of would-be travellers. We are still crossing a desert, between hills rising sharply into mountains. The road gradually improves and snow begins to disappear, the plain changing from brown to dove-colour as the earth grows dryer. At last clouds of dust rise and are blown forward from the wheels. At half-past eleven we reach the relay, having made only four of those weary *farsakhs* which begin to haunt me, just as those dreadful parasangs—of which they are the modern equivalent—used to do in the days of the *Anabasis*. I find Russian soldiers in possession of the caravan-serai, and have to make my luncheon of hard-

boiled eggs and Persian bread in one of the rooms they occupy. Two horsemen and another carriage having arrived, I make my first acquaintance with one of those disputes which render travelling post in Persia so exciting and exhausting an occupation. The drivers wish to make me wait, while they feed and rest the horses I have already used, instead of giving me those which were in the stable when I arrived. The howling shrill-voiced row which ensues, no words can describe. After looking on for some time, I am forced to join in with the most threatening manner I know how to assume,—telling Āghājān to lead the horses out himself, whilst I prevent anyone from interfering. As all the travellers hereabout are covered with cartridge-belts, and carry bulging pistols or long guns slung across their shoulders, it seems advisable to change my own pistol from pocket to pocket, so the mob of bellicose drivers may see that I too am armed. Finally my shouts so encourage the quivering Āghājān that he makes an attempt to lead the horses out and harness them. This decides matters; the battle having lasted long enough to feed and water the horses that arrived after I did, they are now led out and harnessed to the luggage carriage.

These four white beasts—with a saffron strip around their necks and the mark of a hand dipped in henna on each crupper—prove sturdier than the average sorry jade, short as their rest has been. The country is now a dry desert, across which I can

see a mirage of water, with two islands and black objects that might be taken for boats. A number of *fourgons*—one of them with gay-coloured curtains—rumble by, and occasionally a horseman also passes. Villages grow more numerous; each one fortified by mud walls, often with flanking towers, and always with huge gateways dominating all. Bare trees, generally pale brassy poplars, cluster outside and within the walls. The earth, looking as though it might once have been ploughed, is patterned by little runnels made for irrigation. To the left, the hills clutch the plain with toe-like spurs, then rise in rufous cliffs free from snow, which is only visible on the higher peaks peering over hill-crests. On the right, snow still streaks the hills and mantles the mountains far behind. Towards sundown we pass villages closely grouped; in this tender light the fawn-coloured walls and fine tracery of trees, as well as the pale mountains heaving up toward the delicately tinted sky, acquire a fugitive charm they did not possess at noon.

Shortly after sunset, while the last light is fading quickly, we reach our resting-place at Shimrān. Here the road lies between an enormous fortified enclosure with five towers on each side—built in old days to protect caravans against robber bands—and a giant caravanserai, whitewashed and two-storied, a veritable palace. Here I find a small but, for Persia, very clean room, with white walls and a brick floor, giving on the terrace which roofs

the lower story. At the edge there is no railing to prevent one's pitching down to the courtyard below, and in my room there is a second door opening directly on a black void, where poplar tops are just discernible; heedless movements are therefore inadvisable. The fire-place of course collects all the smoke and then belches it steadily into my cell. Winter travellers in Persia soon become so expert at breathing smoke, no fire can ever again alarm them. The much kicked and beaten dogs—whose yelping fills the caravanserai—have climbed the winding stairs, and are now peering timorously through the crack in my door. Receiving encouragement, they drag in their emaciated bodies, slinking into the corners, but gradually grow bold enough to take scraps and bones from my hand.

February 24th

The drivers, having been ordered for six o'clock, manage to appear at seven, and we start at seven-thirty—the hour I had fixed in my mind, which is an improvement on yesterday. On waking, the sky was clear, but a heavy mist soon gathered, enclosing us in shrouds of white, and silvering the ground with rime. Before long, however, as it burns away, the air grows almost hot. Meeting an on-coming carriage, we are forced to exchange one of our teams for theirs, receiving only three horses in return for four. They are, however, the first healthy-looking beasts I have seen, and

drive along heartily. At the next relay there are no horses at all, so we have to wait an hour to rest and feed the poor creatures we brought with us; during which time I make my anchorite's lunch in a corner of the court, in the company of frizzle-feathered hens. The road leads on monotonously through the same dreary plain, but there are more indications of life, even once or twice men engaged in tilling the ground. At last the first signs of Mashhad appear: over a screen of poplar-trees, a golden dome and a larger one of turquoise blue beside a slender minaret, probably the celebrated shrine of Imām Riḍā. As we draw near, one of the city gates appears; a large arch, crowned by two tall pepper-pots coated with diversely coloured tiles, is squeezed between two squat but swelling towers. Instead of entering here, we drive along the walls built of dried clay with scalloped tops, interrupted by buttress-towers at regular intervals; innumerable crows are holding assemblies on the fortifications, or flying away in sable clouds. These crumbling dust-coloured walls, advancing and retreating at various angles, with their lace-like edges festooned with crows, are highly picturesque. We finally enter by another gate, also adorned by several of those elongated pepper-pots which seem so popular here. We then wind through the town in search of the Bank, passing between walls of baked brick faintly umber colour; there are long stretches without houses, just walls en-

closing a property; but even among the shops the streets are, for such a place, rather clean. We are given conflicting directions, and only discover the Bank after driving through the covered bazars, and twice turning around with much difficulty. Here they courteously give me a *farrāsh* to show the way to the "hotel." When I first heard the word *farrāsh* applied to an ordinary attendant in livery, my sensations were curious, as hitherto it had suggested only the "dark Ferrāsh" of 'Umar's verse. This fellow is dark, but not all ominous or romantic; nor can he strike my tent, since to my great regret I do not own one, and must therefore let him guide me to a lodging. The "hotel"—with a sign *Café d'Honneur* over its tiny door—proves to be but little better than a roadside caravanserai. The proprietor asks an exorbitant price for wretched rooms; but since no bargaining will bring him down, and no other place of lodging can be found, I am forced to accept his robber's terms. Just after getting as decently settled as circumstances will permit, I discover the opening of a noisome drain directly below my window; all I can do is to pray that bacilli and noxious gases may prefer the courtyard to my room. Near at hand is the main square of Mashhad; a large open space surrounded by low buildings of brick with occasional ornaments in tile-mosaic, its centre occupied by a modern band-stand, while the walls of a ruinous fortress dominate one corner. A number of Persians are strolling about listening

to a band, wearing the small round black hats of the country, but otherwise dressed in European clothes, often in frock-coats—since any skirtless garment is here considered immodest. All this gives the ancient town a vague air of shoddy modernity.

February 25th

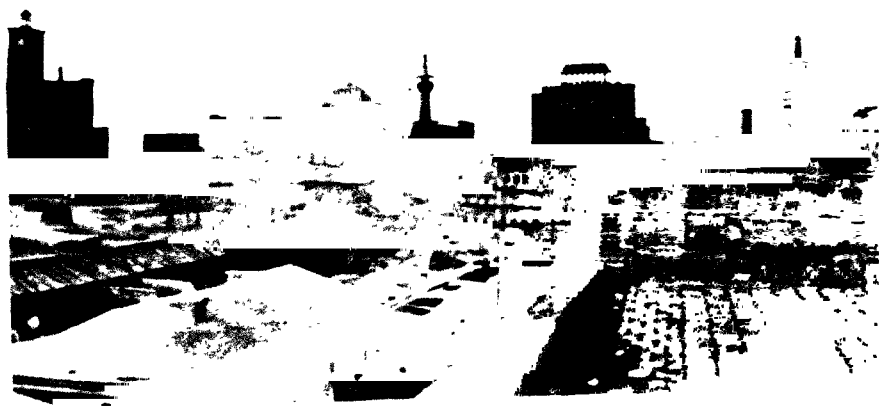
An overcast day. My first visit is to the bazars. They are vaulted by domes of brick, with circular apertures, strengthened here and there by cross-beams on which rows of pigeons perch. There are no gorgeous costumes as in Bukhārā, nor anything really curious; yet I find these bazars more diverting than those in Turkestan—perhaps because I expected nothing. The things which attract attention are: a strange kind of bread like fans of coral, rather sweet and pleasant to taste; small red chickens made of sweetmeats, exposed for sale on the ends of straws; and men making Persian hats. At the rear of the shop a man cards and beats the wool, while others roll disks of wool in a white paste, in order to stiffen them enough to mould them into shape. Most of the wares are obviously of Russian manufacture, but the carpets are the best I have so far seen. At one point there is a glimpse of the Shāh's Mosque, ruinous and with only a few tiles left, but still picturesque. Suddenly I come upon a chain stretched across the bazar; beyond this no foreigner is allowed to pass since Russian troops

violated the shrine of Imām Riḍā, the most sacred spot in all Persia. The truth about such an occurrence is difficult to ascertain anywhere, but in the East doubly so; however, there seems little reason to doubt that the whole affair was pre-arranged by Russian authority, with a view to terrorising the inhabitants. It is believed that the Russian Consul deliberately persuaded men to take *bast* or sanctuary, an immemorial privilege of Persian shrines; then when the *mullās* in charge of the shrine refused to violate the right of sanctuary by handing the men over to the Russian officials, it was bombarded and entered by Russian soldiers acting under orders. The Russians deny having looted the sanctuary; yet the largest of the sacred pictures was, to my own knowledge, afterward offered for sale in Tīhrān, bought, and sent on its way back to Mashhad, through the munificence of a foreign, but not a Russian, official. Whether or not this be the true story, the bombardment of the shrine has caused the Russians to be cordially hated; and neither it nor the hanging of the *mullās* at Tabrīz, will ever be forgiven by Persians.

As there is no hope of getting nearer to the shrine, I persuade a *farrāsh* to show me the way to caravanserai-roofs where views are to be had. From the first, I see the frontal wall and turquoise dome of a nearby mosque, with the minarets and gilded dome of the shrine visible in the distance. Then he leads me by circuitous ways to a roof



The Gates of Masshad



The Shrine of Imām Ridā, Masshad

All unbelievers are forbidden access, but the sanctuary has been bombarded and violated by Russian troops



The Citadel of Tūs
This was the birth- and burial-place of Firdowsi



The First but not the Last Time We Stuck in the Mud
Masshad to Nishāpūr

close to the sanctuary. At my feet a narrow street, thronged with people, leads between rows of booths to a tiled archway, in front of which two long strips of dark blue linen, belonging to some dyer's shop, depend like banners. Past this point no foreigner was ever allowed to go. Beyond the gateway a broad avenue, also densely crowded, reaches to the entrance of the shrine. I can also see a great façade—like those at Samarqand—decorated with tile-mosaics, the main archway being surmounted by a small wooden structure with a sloping roof and arched openings, where objects like lamps are hanging. To right and left are slender minarets, crowned with overhanging cages such as must formerly have existed on the mosques in Turkestan. To the left and at right angles with this façade, the back of another is visible, with the golden cupola of the sanctuary glittering above it even in this sullen light. Still another façade is visible further off, with the blue dome of the mosque I have just seen, in the far distance.

On my way back, I chance upon a scene from the *Arabian Nights*:—escorted by shabby soldiers with rifles and fixed bayonets, three vendors caught thieving or with false weights, are parading the bazars, holding their wares on trays, and with large paper placards, covered with Persian script, pinned on their breasts. A little further on, an amused or indifferent crowd has collected around a poor creature in a fit, that forces him into a

series of contortions like an acrobat's; as horrid a sight as ever I hope to see. The women of Mashhad are enveloped from head to foot in black mantles, and wear white face-veils, put on over the mantle and held in place by two strings fastened by a gold brooch at the back of the head. These veils have two pieces of drawn-work directly over the eyes, and are pulled in at the bottom under the mantle edges, until they look like bibs. These sable females resemble nothing so much as crows hopping along with tails dragging on the ground. Before returning to the hotel, I stop to leave my letter of introduction to the Persian General; he is very civil and wishes to present me to the Governor of Mashhad, a royal prince, one of the innumerable descendants of the prolific Fath 'Alī Shāh. On stopping to pay my respects at the British Consulate General, I find to my surprise that the Consul has heard of my intended visit to Mashhad from friends in London, and has, on learning of my arrival, already sent me an invitation to stay with him. With what alacrity I accept his courteous offer, is easy to imagine.

February 26th

About six o'clock last evening, after donning a ceremonial frock-coat and the opera-hat which is the best imitation of a top-hat I can supply, I walked to the corner of the square, feeling thoroughly ridiculous. Here the Governor's carriage,

drawn by a pair of fast horses and escorted by two cavalry-men, was waiting to dash with me across the square to the entrance of the fortress. There an attendant, only half-visible in the dark, lead me through a tortuous succession of unlighted corridors, where sentinels stationed at intervals saluted by banging the butts of their guns on the ground so suddenly they made me jump. After crossing a court and passing through a large room quite bare except for a carpet, I found the Governor sitting cross-legged on the floor of a smaller room. He is a very small old man, with a drooping moustache and those falling corners of the mouth which so often give a dubious expression to Persian faces. He wore a small Persian bonnet, but a European frock-coat and trousers with white socks, his shoes having of course been removed before entering the house. This cleanly custom, so at variance with Oriental indifference to dirt in general, makes a man feel that to wear boots within doors is really the untidy habit of barbarians. When I entered, the Governor rose to receive me, and—my friend the General acting as interpreter, since the Prince speaks no French—made one of those embroidered speeches that are indispensable in the Orient. I endeavoured to make my replies as flowered as possible, which was the easier as I was speaking French. We then sat around a small table set with cakes and cigarettes, where tea was first served and then small cups of most delicious coffee flavoured with

rose. The room was lighted by two European lamps standing on the floor, and by candlesticks with glass shades placed on the table. While tea was in progress the Governor smoked a wonderful *qalyūn*—as the Persian water pipe is called—that was brought in and placed on a stand beside him. This pipe must have been four or five feet high, with a gold bowl studded with turquoises. It was taken out to be refilled and brought back several times, the Governor each time making a loud bubbly noise as he smoked. When he first took an arm-chair, he kept his feet on the floor, but when the *qalyūn* arrived, drew them up under him, sitting cross-legged like an Eastern potentate on his throne. The commander of the troops came in a little later—a young man speaking excellent French, who has lived ten years in St. Petersburg and speaks Russian, doubtless an ardent pro-Russian, since there are some even in Persia. He very kindly offered me horses and an escort for the excursion to Tūs. The manners of everyone were exquisite, but the whole scene was a peculiar mixture of neglect and ceremonial distinction, not without its dignity.

After my audience was at an end, I returned to the British Consulate, whither my kit had in the meantime been transferred. The Consul is a member of the Indian Political Service, a gentleman of the old school, who combines the learning of a savant with the experience of a soldier. He has a wife and daughter, whose charm and skill render

the remote Consulate as attractive as a home in England. The unstinted hospitality and perfect naturalness of the entire family make a stranger feel perfectly at ease before an hour has passed. To meet such people would be a privilege in any part of the world; to be received in their delightful home after days on the roads of Khurāsān, is a sensation none can appreciate but those who have wandered in the East.

To-day the skies are still threatening. From the window of my room in the Consulate, I can see—above the compound wall and the trees beyond—the blue dome of the mosque between its two slender minarets. About ten o'clock, word comes that the horses which the Commander has so courteously placed at my disposal, have just arrived. I find that he has sent his own superb stallion and a horse for my good-for-nothing yet indispensable interpreter, Āghājān, also two cavalrymen with shaggy Turkoman bonnets, and a *suwār*, or soldier, armed with a gun slung over his shoulder. We therefore form quite a prancing cavalcade, when I start to visit all that Mongol hordes and the son of Tīmūr Lang have left of Tūs—a great city that rose in the reign of Kay Khusraw (the half-mythical King whose name will stir all lovers of 'Umar Fitzgerald), but would probably have been long forgotten, did not fame recall it as the birth-place of Persia's great epic poet Firdawsī. Riding through the muddy streets and out into the level country, the weather begins

to lighten. The clouds, however, still rest on the hills, to-day subtly shaded expanses of blue and purple. At the left, the mountains are metallic and blackish, with unglittering snow-caps—like hard white enamel—lost in the clouds above. Outside the mud-walled villages, poplars form a wavering hedge with their stems of green-gold, like the funeral masks found at Mycenæ, or like brass that has grown green with neglect and rain.

After an exhilarating gallop of two hours across the plain, the ruined mausoleum at Tūs comes into sight, and a half-hour later we reach the waste that was once so great a city. Dismounting to photograph the bridge, my stallion—held by one of the Turkomen—begins to neigh ferociously and let fly at the other horse, which the owner is forced to abandon. My beast continues to neigh and plunge wildly, while the other dashes off pursued by the rest of the escort, until finally captured with some difficulty. Mounting again after this little incident, I cross the Kashaf Rūd—or Tortoise Stream—by the very bridge Firdawsī's much wandering feet must have often trod, as his eyes rested on the mountain-tops I can still see to-day before and behind me. Beside the arches of this bridge—says legend—the precious caravan, bearing gifts of indigo from the repentant "mighty Mahmūd, Allah breathing Lord" of Ghazni, encountered the funeral procession bearing to rest all that was left of the poet, now grown insensible

to all the wealth and honours of the world. Passing through the Rūdbār Gate—called the “Indigo” in memory of this—that is to-day nothing more than a breach in the low mounds to which the ancient walls have crumbled, the mausoleum, erroneously called the Tomb of Firdawsī, looms across the barren plain before me. It is a square building, domed and with great arches, now stripped of all decoration; just bare walls of golden-brown brick, ribbed by the vertical strips and blind arches once encrusted with multi-coloured mosaic. Inside, the dome is pierced by an opening, through which the clouds can be seen scudding in wool-packs across that other “inverted bowl, the sky.”

I am writing stretched on the ground in shade flung by its ruinous walls. All around me stretches the fawn-coloured plain, striped with pale green where the tender shoots of young wheat begin to pierce the earth. Far away to the left the mountains rise, ashen-grey, until the snow just shows below banks of clouds, capping their summits and casting shade far down their flanks. In front of me is a distant line of mud walls, and on a small eminence a few shattered towers, presumably the “Elephant Stables.” Further off, a row of poplars extends to a dust-coloured village, near which other trees create a hazy mass of greys and browns tipped with red. Behind all, the jagged hills, dove-coloured and dappled with moving shadows of soft grey and blue cast by drifting clouds.

For a moment the sun shines brightly, then hesitates and half withdraws. Not a human being is in sight, but sheep are grazing silently not far off. The only sounds the ear can catch, are the rustling of wind and the sweet twittering of larks hidden in the fields; occasionally the sharp neigh of stallions rings out above the music of wind and bird. Nothing remains but walls of crumbled earth and a half-tilled plain; yet here there once stood a great city where Firdawsī lived and wrote deathless verse. Here too the mystic, Alghazālī, evolved his subtle meditation. Their eyes must often have viewed these same mountains, to-day almost unchanged; then, as now, clouds must have banked on the ridge and thrown fleeting shadows across hills and plain. No trace remains of poet or metaphysician—nothing but desolation; yet they are not wholly dead, since a thousand years after their mortal flesh passed hence to corruption, their names still live, thrilling a traveller come from far lands, hidden beyond unsailed seas until long centuries after they went down to death. No! “oblivion has them not”; yet none the less in spots such as this, the thought that all the universe is simply one vast cemetery, and history no more than a necrology, strikes us even more forcibly than ever it did Taine in Pisa’s Campo Santo.

Riding across to the mound of ruins, that was once the citadel of Tūs, I find a moat still partially filled with water, surrounding an embankment,

which a second moat separates from the eminence where the fortress proper used to stand,—now only a frittered stretch of earth and wall at each corner of an enclosure, strewn with stone and only accessible where a causeway joins it to the rampart. After gazing for a few moments, half sadly, across the waste spread before me, I ride back past the mausoleum to a primitive tea-house, where I am now lunching on sandwiches and a fragrant apple which the *suwār* gave me. Lying here on a mound of earth, looking out over the fields of Tūs, some fantastic chain of thought calls to mind the portrait of Goethe, reclining on classic fragments in august contemplation of the Roman Campagna. How wonderful life must be to one possessed of even the hundredth part of his genius and beauty, above all, of a tithe of the serenity he finally attained. A sudden cawing sound, as hundreds of crows fly past, rising and falling like an evil grain tossed by the sowers. Far away the only visible object is the mausoleum, but little deeper yellow than the dusty plain. The clouds have settled, half hiding the hills—now a solid expanse of pale blue fading into vapour, that in spots almost touches the earth with its white and rainy wisps. Above me the sun still shines, but a black shadow is creeping swiftly toward me across the barren plain, where the swift-wheeling crows have just begun to settle on what once was Tūs. Wind moving and the twittering of birds weave a melodious spell, in which

peace and melancholy are so closely mingled they can hardly be distinguished.

On returning I find a crowd outside the gates of Mashhad, grouped beside the road or on the muddy talus, waiting to see some notability arrive from Tīhrān. The effect is like a neglected miniature painted under Shāh 'Abbās, with all its beautiful colours soiled and faded. The broad avenue within the gates, is divided in two by a slimy stream of brown-green water. Enormous *chinār*—or plane-trees—grow on the banks, with large boughs of scaling white, from whose twigs fuzzy brown balls still dangle. The great size and picturesquely contorted limbs of these trees are delightful; when in foliage they must really beautify this, at present, very sordid street. Shops line both sides, built like all Mashhad with dove-coloured brick and plaster, and for the most part of one storey. Long strips of cloth in dark colours—chiefly blue—hang from trees or poles, festooning the road in front of dye-shops. Over-loaded mules and donkeys trot along patiently, and a few camels amble past. Men stroll up and down; children play in the dirt; women hop along bird-fashion, or squat by the walls in groups of three or four, with their face-bibs conspicuous, and occasionally a glassy eye, surrounded by yellow wrinkles, visible where some hag is so old she wears no veil, merely drawing her mantle across the face. In the narrower streets, men are continually popping out of sight down rectangular

openings near the walls, as though diving into treasure-houses. A closer inspection proves them to be merely descending narrow stairs to fill their vessels with fetid water from small tanks at the foot of each flight.

III

MASHHAD TO ṬIHRĀN

III

MASHHAD TO TĪHRĀN

February 28th

LAST night by invitation, I accompanied the Consul to a fancy-dress ball, given by the Russian officers in a badminton-court covered with carpets. It seemed a strange experience in so remote a spot, but was rendered pleasant by the courtesy and hospitality of our hosts. The Russian Consul is a very tall man, looking like a portrait by El Greco, with an abnormally long beard that falls to his waist, and waves every time he speaks, in a manner that quite hypnotised me. Local gossip insists that when travelling, it is wrapped in a blue satin bag; it also credits the Consul with being entirely responsible for the bombardment of the sacred shrine. Russians—at least in Asia—are spy-mad. As soon as I had been presented, the Consul put me through a series of questions, obviously intended to discover who I really was, and for what hidden purpose I had come to Mashhad. It was impossible to resist a malicious impulse to talk about an imaginary American desire to find outlets for

superfluous manufactures, and an equally imaginary American interest in the development of Persia. This seemed to produce its effect, for I noted that each strand of the endless beard quivered with more than its wonted wave. As the Russian Vice-Consul had spent the greater part of his time at dinner the night before, in what he considered adroitly concealed endeavours to "pump" one of the guests about me; there is a probability that I figure as a highly suspicious person in a secret report forwarded to Imperial Government at St. Petersburg.

This morning the sky is so threatening I can hardly make up my mind to start on my long journey, particularly as I am loath to leave the gracious hospitality of the British Consulate; however, after much hesitation, I decide to do so. Since even such sorry carriages as brought me from Askābād, are scarce and cost a small fortune for the trip from Mashhad to Ṭihrān; I finally hired an extraordinary old waggon rather like an omnibus, with springs that look as though they might withstand travel on what Persians call roads. The renting of these vehicles and the arrangements for horses are vaguely connected with Government; when I had selected my ark, and recovered from the shock which the price fixed by official tariff gave me, long documents in fine Persian characters had to be drawn up, and duly signed by me and sealed by the postal authorities. My ignorance of the Persian language obliged me to

accept the worthless word of Āghājān in regard to the nature of this document; so I sympathise with those who, in mediæval times, travelled with letters they could not read, which purported to secure them preferment, but might, on delivery, prove orders to slay the bearer. This mysterious agreement was of course only delivered into my hands when I had acceded to the official's request for a gratification.—I am beginning to suspect that in Persia the Shāh himself might accept a tip, and feel certain that the mutual pursuit of "presents" will in time establish such sympathy between the Persians and their Russian suzerains as should annihilate all animosities.

The spectacular conveyance that is to carry me six hundred miles across Khurāsān to the capital of Persia, still shows a few signs of its quondam coat of paint. It has a long bench running the length of each side, three windows on a side, and a roof equipped with a gallery for luggage. The sashes, which rattle in the warped frames, are guiltless of glass, so the vehicle is open to wind and rain. On hiring it, I stipulated that it should be washed, after removing several inches of dried mud, and also be furnished with some means of keeping out rain. On arriving this morning, it was resplendent with two pieces of striped red muslin nailed down over all the windows, so that air and outlook could only be had through the door. As I finally managed to have these curtains rolled up, the carriage is now less

like a prison-van. It takes a long while to bring my luggage out, dispose it on the roof, cover it in against rain, and rope it in place. My experienced guide is naturally incapable of doing this, all the work being done by my invaluable Saïd. By the time we lumber away from the gates of the hospitable Consulate, it is eight o'clock; for, in this country, the traveller rises before dawn to await the pleasure of his drivers as meekly as he is able. The benches are covered with seats of a most superior red velvet, and I have had extra cushions made in the bazar, so it is possible to lie comfortably stretched at half length, as we rumble along like gypsies in their cart.

A last view of Mashhad, the turquoise dome of the mosque and the gilded cupola of the shrine with its minarets, visible above the clay walls and crumbled towers surrounding the town; then the road begins to rise more and more steeply, up the last spur of the range we skirted on the way from Shimrân. After climbing eight hundred feet above Mashhad our troubles begin, when at eleven o'clock the carriage sticks in the mud near the top of a steep hill, or—to be accurate—the horses refuse to drag it further. They are harnessed in an idiotic manner which prevents all four pulling at once; they also kick violently when whipped, but refuse to work. A number of passers-by decline to lend a hand even when offered money; a feeble old man is the only one eager to help. The driver dances about like a hundred-limbed

demon, shouting, beating his horses, and jerking their bridles; Saïd and Āghājān—the latter very feebly—tug at the rear wheels; but all is of no avail. Finally some men willing to be of service, come in sight and, after unloading the luggage, carry it to the top of the hill. The horses—really quite able beasts—then consent to budge, and at last reach the top. When the kit has been roped on the roof once more, and we have gone a scant half-mile, the carriage proceeds to stick fast on another hill! After a series of struggles, the driver jumps on one of the animals and drives off to the relay in search of extra horses. To pass the time, I lunch in the carriage, and then sit on a rock by the roadside, looking down the valley and reading Morier's inimitable tale, *Haji Baba of Ispahan*. The nature and customs of the Persians seem unchanged since the days when the brilliant Englishman wrote his great picaresque novel; the only difference is that the picturesque has now disappeared. The delights of Haji Baba beguile the time, until the coachman returns with two new horses and a diminutive driver, whose enormous bonnet of shaggy fur makes him look like a Fiji Islander. After changing two horses and unsuccessfully attempting to start, I insist, much against the drivers' will, that a fifth horse shall be harnessed to the pole in front of the others. Despite a laying on of whips, and a succession of yells from the drivers worthy of a band of cannibals, the carriage remains steadfast, while the

lead-horse nearly kicks the others—not to mention the men—into pieces. I am therefore reluctantly forced to let them work with only four horses in their own foolish fashion; after a long struggle they drag the old omnibus out of the ruts, only to stick fast a third time at two o'clock. The view of the hill-slopes sinking down to the plain dappled with cloud shadows, has no interest for me now, and my irritation is intense. However, we succeed in extricating ourselves, and at last reach the relay.

As there is a sharp ascent immediately ahead, I insist on being given the six horses which I rightly maintained were necessary on leaving this morning. We quickly climb to some seventeen hundred feet above Mashhad, then—after alternately descending and rising through wild and barren country—reach a crest whence a great plain is visible, stretching away to snow mountains. The road pitches down suddenly, bringing us to Sharīfābād about five o'clock. I was told that there were decent caravanserais on this route, but find a vile place here. A sombre passage, ankle-deep with red mud, leads to a mucky court where a few poplars are growing. On one side is a series of small rooms—the walls black with smoke, the wall-niches filled with cigarette ashes, burnt matches, and other oddments, and the floors covered by rugs shiny with the grease and filth of generations. Of course there is absolutely no furniture in any caravanserai in Persia; the

traveller must carry everything he needs with him. Luckily I had a foreboding of conditions before I started; but even so, have not half the things I require. To add to the charms of my dwelling, the other side of the court is occupied by natives, whose habits I shall leave to the imagination.

March 1st

"Philanimaly" appears to be as unwise as philanthropy in these parts. Last night the glitter of a cat's green eyes remained fixed at a crack in my tumble-down doors, until I politely invited her in and gave her scraps from what passed for a dinner. She has most felinely repaid me by stealing to-day's lunch! Āghājān secured a great prize in the shape of a miniature leg of mutton, which when cooked was placed for safety on a high ledge above the fire-place in Saïd's room, whence the truly Persian pussy carried it off this morning. Saïd has only just discovered the theft and come to tell me of it. His usually rather impassive face is a study fit for a painter. How the cat managed to get a piece of meat as large as herself out into the court and over a wall eight or ten feet high, is so much beyond me, I cannot really begrudge her the prize. When I leave, she is seated on the wall above the courtyard door, her paws demurely folded under her, smiling like Alice's Cheshire Cat—a picture of silent triumph.

Beyond Sharifābād the road rises abruptly;

but six horses and a tolerably intelligent driver prevent a repetition of yesterday's happenings. The sun is warm and bright. At the first relay there is one of the ancient fortified caravanserais, probably built under the magnificent Shāh 'Abbās, who caused them to be erected along the principal routes of trade;—a large brick building around a court, with a curiously vaulted chamber that must have been used as a stable. From here the road ascends sharply through a cleft in the clay hills, only to descend once more to the plain, which now widens out until—as we skirt the northern range—the mountains on the other side seem remote and faintly blue-white against the sky, where the wind is shepherding round pearly clouds. These mountains rise abruptly from the plain, apparently clutching it with paw-like formations. The lower slopes, devoid of vegetation and ribbed like sand-dunes, are metallic, ranging from grey through brown to greenish yellow, with here and there sanguine spurs. Higher up, the snow lies like a white mantle flung across the summits. Banks of cloud rest on the peaks or drift slowly past, hiding the sun at intervals, and casting huge shadows that wander solemnly across the plain. Villages are visible here and there; often perched on top of a foot-hill, but always fortified by walls and towers. Men are tilling the ground with primitive wooden ploughs, which—I am sure—differ but little from those in use when Darius fled the triumph of Iskandar.

About three o'clock Qadamgāh comes into sight; a spot renowned because the Imām Riḍā here met a stone, which rolled out from the precincts of the fire-worshippers, beseeching him to free it from the agonies of the damned. The saint obligingly stepped upon it; legend does not relate whether or not this solaced the soul-stone, but does affirm that the sacred foot-prints remained indelible, and that—when the relic had in after years been lost—the Imām informed Shāh ‘Abbās of its whereabouts in a vision. Such interruptions to the eternal beatitude of Paradise, arising from terrestrial solicitude, must be trying even to saints, and were perhaps devised to keep them in training. According to Shi‘ite tradition, this same Imām is still obliged to travel to Qum by air every Thursday, in order to spend the day with his beatified sister, Fāṭima. The dome which Shāh ‘Abbās kindly built over the recovered relic is the first thing to catch the eye. The town is situated on the two low hills of buff-coloured earth, which enclose a narrow valley running back toward the mountains. On the easternmost and ruddier of the two, nothing is visible except the jagged remains of a shattered tower standing at each corner. The other hill is surmounted by a town, fortified with walls and swelling towers of sun-dried clay, the same colour as the hillside; it looks like a turreted crown on the brow of Cybele. Little houses of mud crowd down the lower slopes of both hills, and across the valley-

mouth. A snow-peak serenely rises above the twin hills, dominating the entire scene with its placid grandeur. To right and left, the snowy outlines of other mountains sweep away.

The mosque is built on level ground in front of the valley inside an enclosure, above whose sombre boughs the blue dome glitters with reflected light. To the left a fawn-coloured portal stands out against the green-white limbs of a lofty *chinār* tree. A hush overhangs the scene, only broken by the caw of circling crows and the cries of children playing far off by the hill-top walls. Going nearer, I slip through a postern into the walled garden around the mosque, half afraid lest I offend and be ejected; but no one is in sight. In the centre is an octagonal building encrusted with tiles—mainly blue. A circular drum supports a dome nobly shaped; its turquoise-coloured tiling is patterned with twisted lines of white, and diamonds of mingled black, white, and yellow. A long tuft of greyish grass grows near the top—like plumes on a helmet. Everywhere lofty pines spread their long boughs above shaggy trunks slanting eastward. These rugged trees are said to have been brought from the far-off Himalayas by pilgrims, four centuries since. *Chinār* trees mingle their scaling limbs with the pines, and shrubs—now bare—abound. Down the centre of the brick pathway in front of the mosque, a stream of water runs through a channel, until it leaps to a lower terrace, passes through a large



The Mosque of Qadamgah



Qadamgah



The Dyers' Gate, Nishāpūr



Entrance to the Governor's House, Nishāpūr

basin, and leaves the enclosure. Looking upward, the snow mountains seem to peer across the plain through the rustling pines, while the walled village looks directly down from the hills. The sun is bright but languid, and peace is everywhere—born of sougling wind, the music of running water, and the distant sound of birds calling in cadence: "Sweet, sweet, sweet." It is my first view of a Persian garden, amid whose mingled neglect and care I would lief linger.

Outside the entrance is a broad terrace, below which the ground descends in a series of terraces, where the water runs in channels and through basins. On a small platform beside the largest of these, two immense *chinārs* stand as if guarding the portal.

There is the usual excitement about horses and harness, producing the usual delay. We finally start, with an extra horse tied behind in case of need, and an extra driver escorting us on horseback. The extra horse soon breaks loose and gallops homeward; he has to be pursued and brought back—too fatigued to be of any use. . . . As the sun begins to sink, two horsemen ride furiously toward us, making signs. Remembering stories of attacks along this road, Said and I have our pistols ready; but they prove to be a peaceful escort sent to meet me by the Governor of Nishāpūr, on receipt of a letter from his uncle, the Governor of Mashhad. They gallop along beside or before us, whirling their guns in a rude fantasia.

The sun having dipped behind the hills, the snow mountains begin to flush like roses, then gradually acquire a glaze of lavender that pales with the waning light. The walls of Nīshāpūr soon come into sight: high battlements of dried earth now empurpled by the sunset. On reaching the city, we drive round the walls and towers, coldly radiant in this purple light, beetling above us across an empty moat, and enter the Dyer's Gate. At the post-house, I find it is so late the Governor's servant thought I was not coming and went away a few moments ago, after leaving a message. I therefore mount a horse belonging to one of the escort, and at nightfall ride as best I can on a Persian saddle, whip in hand, through the bazars of Nīshāpūr. On reaching the outskirts of the town, we enter a poplar alley, above whose feathery tops:

“Yon rising Moon that looks for us again,”

swings up the sky, still lucent with the last glow of expiring day. The lane is blocked by the dark outline of a large house. At the gateway a servant is waiting, but neither much calling nor loud knocking at the barred door brings anyone to open for us. Here I am in ‘Umar's city, standing between day and night amid the now nearly gathered darkness, watching how:

“The little Moon look'd in that all were seeking;”

and minded to cry out—if only I knew Persian:

“ . . . Open then the Door!
You know how little while we have to stay,
And, once departed, may return no more.”

Finally footsteps ring out through a paved passageway, and the great doors swing open. After walking through the gate and up a flight of brick stairs, I find myself on a terrace overlooking a garden filled with what appear to be the ghosts of poplar trees, illumined by a moon which forces me to muse with an appositeness almost startling:—

“How oft hereafter will she wax and wane;
How oft hereafter rising look for us
Through this same Garden—and for *one* in vain!”

March 2nd

Last night I was ushered into a large room over the gateway, with fine carpets on the floor, and on a long table in the centre. A number of quiet servants made the fire and drew the curtains, whilst Āghājān went off to the post-house to fetch Saïd and what luggage I needed. About an hour later—after his visit had been fore-announced—the Governor arrived, preceded by a servant carrying a lighted candle. He is a pleasant and extremely courteous young man—I should think about twenty-seven years old—who speaks French, but with much difficulty. He immediately enquired at what hour I should like to dine; it was then about eight and I very hungry. But, remembering

I had heard that Persians dined about eleven o'clock at night, I only ventured say:—whenever his servants were ready. After a considerable time, the table was covered with a great number of small dishes: raw eggs, small cold baked potatoes, peeled pomegranates, nuts, bread, *most*—a favourite Persian dish of curds, in this case deliciously flavoured with an herb like *estragon*; and many similar appetizers. These I imagined to be *hors-d'œuvres*, but when—after eating a little and waiting a long while—nothing else was brought, I decided that this was dinner and fell to once more. A full hour passed in laborious conversation; the Governor telling me how unhappy all Persians were on account of the interference in their affairs of the Great Powers, and more particularly of Russia; and also how he longed to travel outside his own country, the which his uncle—the Governor of Mashhad and head of the family—would not permit. About this there was something almost pathetic, as his face wore an expression of natural intelligence stupefied by inaction and isolation. His hands were incessantly busy with one of those strings of beads which Persians carry, not like rosaries for religious use, but merely to occupy the hands. At first I addressed him as *Votre Excellence*, but saw—when he wrote his name for me—that he too was a royal descendant of Fath 'Alī Shāh; whereupon I employed *Votre Altesse* so emphatically and frequently, no irritation—if already felt—could remain. To my dis-

may, the servants reappeared at eleven o'clock and cleared the table, then covered it with a linen cloth. They next cut the flat Persian bread into strips, which they laid along the edges of the table; after this they brought in enough dinner for a regiment. There were two dishes of everything, one for the Governor and one for me, certainly forty all told; enormous platters of *pilaw*—the Persian national dish of rice—variously prepared, a kind of kidney stew, potato cakes fried after being dipped in egg and sprinkled with rice, a stew of meat and spinach, in a folded flap of bread, more spinach, in a second, bits of meat, a wonderful bowl of curds and parsley, bowls of *most*, and at each corner of the table chopped parsley with a piece of butter in the centre. All these and many more were placed on the table at once, to be eaten as whim suggested. In my honour there were plates and forks, a highly European innovation. The Governor helped himself to the dishes before him, and I—watching with the corner of an anxious eye—did likewise, manfully trying to forget that I had already made a meal. The Prophet's inhibition did not prevent my host from drinking some excellent Russian cordials. The servants were numerous and wonderfully silent, but our dinner was accompanied by the howling of a jackal wandering outside Nīshāpūr in search of food. It was past midnight when the Governor withdrew.

This morning I can see that my room overlooks

both the street and a large garden, which might—like most Persian gardens—more properly be called a grove, since it is entirely planted with trees. With one exception the windows have solid wooden shutters, so that, if closed, no one can see out. The garden is only visible when I step out on the terrace; now it is dreary and unkempt, but must—with its great alleys—be delicious in spring and summer. The sun is shining brightly when I ride off to visit the Tomb of ‘Umar Khayyām. The Governor has sent me a beautiful grey stallion, which to ride is a pleasure; and my escort of five is led by the chief-steward, a wonderful old fellow looking as though he had just stepped out of an ancient tale. We ride the length of the bazars,—where my escort shoves mules and men aside to let me pass, and where sun-rays drop to the ground in a slanting sheet striped with black and gold,—then leave the city behind. On either hand of the plain, snow-peaks shimmer in the sun; those on the further side with bases merged in mist, until the summits of faint white seem to float above the horizon like icebergs seen across an ocean. Mounds of earth dot the plain,—all that is left of the various cities built successively, only to be razed by some conquering lord. To us Nīshāpūr suggests only ‘Umar Khayyām, but to Persians his name means little. He was an orthodox Sunnīte, a sect the Shī‘ites hate bitterly, cursing their khalifs to this day; and was in Persian but a mediocre poet, whose

verses at least one educated Persian claims to have been so vastly beautified by the genius of Fitzgerald, as scarcely to be recognisable. The city has, however, been the dwelling of noted men, among them several of those enigmatic Ṣūfī poets, whose mystic creed finds so noble an expression in the lines of Jāmī that occupy my memory, riding over the plain toward the tomb of a great Ṣūfī—Farīdu'd-Dīn' Aṭṭār:

“O Thou, whose memory quickens lovers' souls,
 Whose fount of joy renews the lover's tongue,
 Thy shadow falls across the world, and they
 Bow down to it; and of the rich in beauty
 Thou art the riches that make lovers mad.
 Not till Thy secret beauty through the cheek
 Of Laila smite does she inflame Majnūn,
 And not till Thou have sugar'd Shīrīn's lip
 The hearts of those two lovers fill with blood.
 For lov'd and lover are not but by Thee,
 Nor beauty; mortal beauty but the veil
 Thy heavenly hides behind, and from itself
 Feeds, and our hearts yearn after as a bride
 That glances past us veil'd—but even so
 As none the beauty from the veil may know.
 How long wilt Thou continue thus the world
 To cozen with the phantom of a veil
 From which Thou only peepest?—Time it is
 To unfold Thy perfect beauty. I would be
 Thy lover, and Thine only—I, mine eyes
 Seal'd in the light of Thee to all but Thee,
 Yea, in the revelation of Thyself
 Self-lost, and conscience-quit of good and evil.

Thou movest under all the forms of truth,
 Under the forms of all created things;
 Look whence I will, still nothing I discern
 But Thee in all the universe."

The tomb of the famous Sheykh 'Attār lies in a barren plain, inside an enclosure of cream-coloured brick; a small octagonal building also of brick, surmounted by a cupola. It contains only a vaulted chamber, in whose center stands a white plaster-covered block with a beautifully wrought inscription. On the tomb lies a loose leaf inscribed with verses from the Qur'ān. Here in the midst of desolation, is the abandoned tomb of him who filled half Asia with his fame. It is curious to reflect that there is perhaps truth in the tradition which relates how here in Nīshāpūr the aged Sūfī, by whose forgotten dust I am standing, encountered a little child, Jalālu'd-Dīn Rūmī (afterwards to become the greatest of all mystic poets) and gave the boy a copy of a work of his own, prophesying that Jalālu'd-Dīn's celebrity would later arouse the world.

Gallop ing away across little streams and dried fields, we reach the Mosque of Imām Zāda-i-Maḥrūq, where lies what once was 'Umar. At the rear of a walled garden, the mosque stands—its blue dome spangled with tricoloured diamonds. An avenue of *narband* trees, with an empty tank in the centre, leads from the portal to a broad terrace in front of the mosque. 'Umar is buried in the



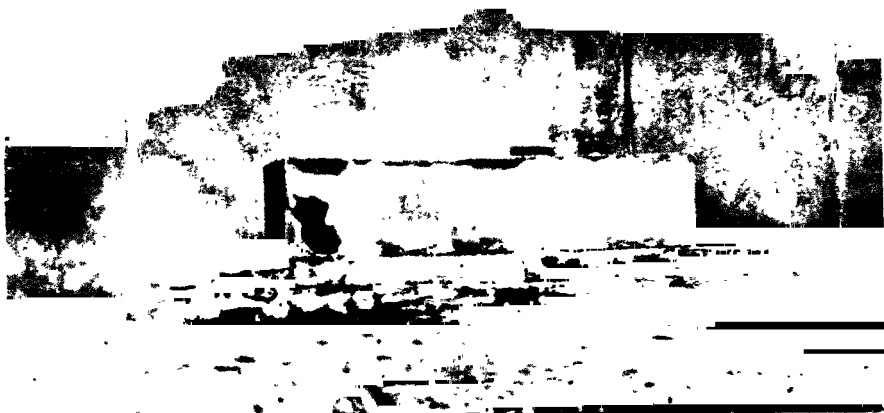
A Servant with the Governor of Nishāpūr's Falcon



The Governor of Nishāpūr's Head-Servant



Mosque of Imām Zāda-i-Mahruq, Nishāpūr
Umar Khayyām is buried in the central niche of the left wing, where the slab stands



The Grave of 'Umar Khayyām. Nishāpūr
The black object on the slab of brick and plaster is a dirty brick cast by a passer-by

centre one of three open niches, forming the left wing. His grave is marked by a low slab, built like the niches of brick, and like them roughly coated with plaster scaling off in spots. There is no inscription; no stone bears so much as his name; no "cypress-slender minister of wine" pours libations to his thirsty dust; no roses drop on his tomb, where in place of a bough some passer-by has cast a dirty brick. The walls of the niche are scrawled over with drawings and verses—undoubtedly ribald; for the tendency of good-for-nothings is here stimulated by the tradition that 'Umar was not a strict Muslim, or was at best but an orthodox Sunnīte. His burial-place has therefore always been treated with disrespect.

Is it not a part of the mockery usually meted out by that master ironist—fate, that he who prayed for foliage beside his grave, should lie in a sordid niche of brick and plaster, defiled by inept vulgarity? Sitting on the steps beside 'Umar's tomb, a realisation of how all things deride us, and a consciousness of the coarse indifference of mankind, steal over me. Before me, the neglected garden stretches, its bare boughs only interrupted by the olive globe of a single pine; far away over the tree-tops, the great white mountains are sharply outlined against a sky of pale cobalt, where shreds of cloud hang motionless. These noble peaks are the only beautiful thing there is to see, and them the grave of 'Umar faces; so at least he is spared the ugliness of burial in

cities. His dust—now mingled with the general earth—looks out toward that sky,

“Whereunder crawling coop’d we live and die,”

in sight of the white majesty of hills, over which his living gaze must often admiringly have wandered. A green-turbaned Persian is seated on the terrace-edge watching me, whilst two men are at work near the mosque door, and the cries of my escort outside the walls, ring out above the call of birds. In spring verdure must make this garden lovely; but cannot even then grace the pencil-defiled niche which shelters the poet for whom we dreamed an alabaster slab, carved over with fine Arabic script:—a grave in the midst of grass under swaying rose-bushes, in a garden where running water makes a music that is yet a silence, so a listening ear almost perceives the sound of rose-leaves, fluttering down to touch that earth in which lies—enriching their roots—the dust of him who in life loved them so, he entwined their name in his verse—until to-day none who love them can dissociate their perfume and ‘Umar’s quatrains. He does indeed lie by a garden-side, but one no longer “not unfrequented”; perhaps in summer “the blowing rose” grows underneath the then leafy trees, and a stray petal may drift over the terrace wall, settling on his neglected tomb; even so it can scarcely atone for such unworthy surroundings. Here poetry, which

sometimes haunts ruin and abandon, can only droop in sight of this sordid wall.

The man who [whether mystic or misbeliever] cried centuries ago—

“ . . . My buried Ashes such a snare
Of Vintage shall fling up into the Air
As not a True-believer passing by
But shall be overtaken unaware; ”

lies in a grave where the only green thing is a tiny weed, which I pluck from a crack in the brick wall beside his wordless slab. Is there not perhaps a yet subtler irony in the fact that what a man longed for in the physical world, is granted him in a figurative sense, which, however noble, is still derisive? ‘Umar’s bones lie without bush or vine to shade them; but his soul has flung into the world “such a snare of vintage,” as has caught and curled round all poetry’s true-believers; and in their hearts they have reared over his memory shrines where roses blossom, so fair earth’s loveliest are weeds beside them. In the minds of men, “the rose of his remembrance” knows no autumn, throughout a world greater than any ‘Umar ever conceived in the wildest of his wine-flushed dreams. So, could he decide, he might prefer to the letter of his wish, these super-sensual bowers where his undying spirit forever wanders. . . .

After luncheon the Governor pays me another visit, taking me into the garden for a walk and tea. He is a lover of hawking and very proud

of his falcons. In response to my enquiries he sends for three of his retainers, who appear—each with a splendid bird of prey perched on his gloved fist. They are sinewy birds; lithe, quiet, and very cruel-looking, the largest of the three with tiny bells about his legs and an ornament around his neck.

March 3rd

We finally succeeded in leaving Nīshāpūr at eight o'clock, after struggles even greater than those I have learned to think unavoidable in Persia. Yesterday the Governor's chief-steward would not permit Āghājān to buy anything for a lunch to be carried with me, insisting that he would provide all I needed. As the men had received their tips last night, neither servants nor luncheon appeared this morning. After waiting a full half-hour, I gave it up and started off on foot to overtake Āghājān, who had gone ahead to the post-house with the luggage. On arriving, I found him seated on the roof of the omnibus contemplating the luggage; not a horse was visible, although—before leaving the house—he had assured me they were waiting. So I scolded him with all possible asperity, and sent him back to see if he could discover my Tantalian luncheon. As no one showed any signs of bringing out the horses, the usually quiet Said at last grew angry enough to speak to the driver in French, and make signs to him to fetch the horses. This producing

no effect, I decided to try the methods I had often heard were necessary in the East. First I pushed one of the drivers violently toward the stable; then—this being ineffectual—seized him by the scruff of the neck, shook him soundly, and flung him toward the door. Still no result; so I proceeded to administer two vigorous kicks to that portion of the anatomy provided by nature for the purpose. About this time another driver brought out the horses, and Āghājān slunk back without the lunch. We then started, and—after immediately breaking a whiffletree—finally succeeded in getting under way.

The horses in Persia are wretched beyond words to describe; poor tired beasts, covered with galls and often blind in one eye, whose tortured existence makes travel unendurable. The traveller is impotent to alleviate their suffering; if he will not start with them, he has to wait hours, only to watch the next carriage take the poor animal his pity has refused. Neither words nor example can awake humanity in owners and drivers. Once when I discovered, between relays, that the collar of one of the team was pressing the skin back from an immense wound in rolls,—the driver replied to my angry remonstrance, that it was all right inasmuch as the horse was in that condition before we started! The harness is an inconceivable collection of frayed rope and rotten bits of leather, which falls apart and has to be tied up continually. The drivers—about the most debased specimens

I have ever beheld—have no idea of harnessing their horses in such a way as to get the most use from them; and can only make the poor jades move at all by a ceaseless whipping and yelling, which sickens the traveller. Even when they can be persuaded to take extra horses, in view of the impossible condition of the roads, nothing can make them use all the horses at once. They drive four of them abreast, as hard and long as possible, while a second driver gallops beside the carriage on the extra horse; then half way up a steep hill, when the team is quite exhausted, they harness the fifth horse beside the others, where he is of small use.

Before leaving Nīshāpūr the Governor offered me an escort, which I declined as it is unnecessary on this part of the road, and only a nuisance. Nevertheless some two hours after leaving, a solitary *suwār* overtakes us, and two more fall in at the second relay. The road grows steadily worse. Ahead of us is a muddy stream with an abrupt bank on either side, bordered by a bog in which the driver sinks up to his knees. It looks as though the carriage must stick fast in the middle; but after we have all got out, the coachman manages to take it across safely—while I watch with my heart in my mouth. He then leads the horses back for us to ride across, and—after reharnessing—starts on once more. The day is still overcast and the scenery desolate; a morose and barren expanse of greenish plain,



View from the Grave of 'Umar Khayyām, Nishāpūr
A garden-side no longer "not unfrequented"



Where 'Umar Khayyām is Buried
The Mosque of Imām Zāda-i-Māhrūq, Nishāpūr



A Road in Khurāsān
The post-master's carriage stuck in a foot of mud



What Happens to a Carriage when the Horses Try to Drag it out of the Mud

strewn with boulders and dotted with dried shrubs. In the distance it turns dull purple, stretching before us—a waveless sea from which a long ridge of olive-black emerges like a dinosaur's back. Far away the light filters through a grey pall, falling on snow mountains whose ghastly pallor only intensifies the dreariness. All day we advance slowly through this depressing country, which recalls all the forlorn wastes that writers ever described. About five o'clock, when we are just ending our last stage, another *sawār* gallops up; this seems to me a little too much, so I shall cut his tip to the vanishing point.

We have now reached Ribāṭ-i-Za'farānī—the Saffron Guardhouse; so-called from the colour of the great caravanserai built under Shāh 'Abbās; I cannot, however, see that the brick differs from that in the other serais dotted along the road. The old caravanserai is more or less abandoned—too filthy even for Persians, so I am lodged in a smaller modern building. In a corner of the courtyard a woman is baking bread, that is to say laying flaps of dough on the inner side of an immense earthen jar surrounded by a rough furnace. A friendly donkey is watching the proceedings. A little way off, is a curious conical building made of clay in huge steps, so that it looks like a magnified bee-hive. By appearances it ought to be a mausoleum, but on inspection proves a receptacle for storing frozen snow brought from the mountains.

March 4th

A disagreeable day, with a fine drizzle that turns to rain shortly after leaving. About eleven o'clock Sabzawār comes into sight; a large town with walls, above which a few tree-tops show, preceded by a collection of mud hovels and a number of small mosque-like buildings of brick, half in ruin. After entering the gate, we drive to the post-house on the other side of the city, through the bazars—a series of high arcades of yellow brick, each with an opening for light in the centre. They are cleaner than any I have seen in Persia, and the lofty proportions of their almost Gothic arches, lend them a certain elegance. The wares for sale are of course largely Russian, but for some reason look less trashy than usual; indeed the whole bazar has a livelier and neater air than those of Mashhad or Nishāpūr, yet seems more truly Oriental. There are no costumes to compare with the brilliant ones of Bukhārā, which in retrospect seem finer than they did in reality. Here the prevailing tone is a ruddy brown; but the vivid greens, so frequently worn in girdles and turbans, make spots of beautiful colour which liven the scene. One man has a ruby-coloured turban, and a well-grown boy, sitting in front of a shop at stately ease, is dressed in a splendid robe of amethyst velvet.

The rain is falling fast, spattering through the eyes of the bazar cupolas, when I start out to visit the Governor (a son-in-law and—I believe—a

nephew of the Governor of Mashhad) whom I was advised to see in regard to taking an armed escort for the part of the road just ahead of us. It is considered dangerous on account of raids by marauding Turkomen, whose activities Russia is supposed to stimulate in order to secure pretexts for interference in Persia. Turning to the left of the main bazars, we pass through a short street into a dilapidated square, dominated by the ruins of a once imposing fortress of clay-brick, whose walls and towers have crumbled, until it looks not unlike the ruins of a mediæval castle in France. The Governor's house is reached by a door at one side of this square; after crossing a shabby court and climbing a narrow twisting staircase, I find myself in a sort of ante-chamber; after a few moments I am ushered—under a lifted curtain—into a small room entirely carpeted with rather good rugs. In one corner, near the windows occupying the whole of one side, an elderly man is seated on the floor, Persian fashion, on his heels. A very beautiful small carpet is hanging on the wall behind him; in front of him the floor is littered with writing materials and official papers, near which an elderly man with a dyed red beard is sitting. The Governor is a tall elderly man, with long features and a two days' growth of grizzled beard. In addition to the flat Persian cap and the inevitable European frock-coat, he is wearing a brown mantle thrown across his shoulders. His appearance and manners are not without dignity.

The only furniture in the room is a small stove and six chairs ranged along the wall, one of which is advanced for my use. In this carpeted room among unshod people, I find our dirty custom of wearing muddy boots in the house quite embarrassing.

As the Governor can speak only three or four words of French, I am forced to summon Āghājān to interpret. We then go through the process of having our words interpreted, while we smile and bow to each other like a pair of china mandarins. It appears that the Governor received a telegram from the British Consul announcing my arrival, but took an Austrian travelling on foot for me, and gave him an escort of two *sawārs* this morning. He tells me, however, that for persons travelling post, the road is safe; I therefore decline his offer of a guard, but accept an order entitling me to demand an escort wherever I think fit. He invites me to stay the night at his house; inasmuch as it is only noon and I am anxious to push on, I decline his invitation with thanks. He then gives me his photograph and a piece of needle-work done by one of his family; regretting that, as he was not prepared for my arrival, he cannot offer me a rug like the one I admired behind him. His manner is so kind and courteous that I leave with a most pleasant impression.

On the way back I purchase meat, a rare article in these parts, and some cakes which—being less oily and dirt-covered than usual—appear edible.

On reaching the carriage, I am forced to get in it to eat my lunch, since there is nowhere else to sit. I am soon surrounded by interested observers, but fortunately have begun to realise that persons who wander through the East, must accustom themselves to the public performance of what we consider private occupations. The rain now falls steadily, splashing on the roof. Āghājān is, as usual, inefficient as a baby in regard to getting the drivers ready, proposing to await their good pleasure in starting. He has no initiative, and accomplishes nothing unless I stand by cursing. Kind words and encouragement I have long realised to be useless. It is also impossible to extract from him an accurate answer to any question; as I am entirely dependent on him for information, his shiftiness is maddening. After shaking him up as much as I can, we manage to start about one o'clock with the same four horses we brought with us, there being no others. The driver who—it transpires—has only been five days on the road, is a poor specimen even for a Persian.

We have gone but a few hundred yards outside the town, when the harness breaks beyond any possibility of the usual tying up with string; so the driver jumps on a horse and rides back to town for repairs. After we have waited in the rain for a half-hour, he reappears, accompanied by a man riding one horse and leading another. He is tall and lantern-jawed, about as evil-looking a fellow as I care to see. At first Āghājān says

the man has brought horses of his own, which he wishes to rent; for this he will of course cheat me outrageously, but the road being very bad, I am willing to submit to robbery within certain limits. As soon as I tell Āghājān to bargain for them, he announces that they do not belong to the man, who—knowing that we could not possibly reach the next relay to-night—has brought them out merely to help us back to Sabzawār. This immediately arouses both Saïd's and my suspicions, as a short stay in this country suffices to make one cynical; but it is impossible to discover what the man's motives really are. I try to extract information from Āghājān, in order to decide whether to return or not; this of course proves useless, as the only coherent statement he makes, is that the driver—who before starting said we could easily reach the next relay by dark—now insists it cannot be done under ten or twelve hours; the reason for this, impossible to elicit. In the meanwhile the new-comer has unharnessed a second horse, and interferes every time I order a question put to our driver, who stands about doing nothing. Gradually it leaks out that he is insisting our horses and driver are tired and hungry; and that we have no right to take the horses. This shows that he is, as suspected, trying to gain some end of his own. What it may be, I cannot tell; but—as Saïd says—it is evident he has not come “pour le bien de Monsieur.”

Whilst Saïd and I are standing near the carriage,

this obnoxious individual jumps on the box beside Āghājān, takes the reins, turns the carriage round, and starts the two horses toward Sabzawār. This being a little too much, I decide to proceed at any cost, since I am certain that some ill is intended, and will not, at any rate, submit to such high-handedness. I shout to Āghājān to ask the man what he means by getting on the carriage without my orders; and to tell him to turn it back and harness the other horses immediately. Like the born idiot he is, Āghājān jumps down, leaving the man alone on the box; whereupon he whips up the horses and starts off at a gallop, which looks at though I should never see carriage or luggage again. Said and I start after it on a dead run—despite long coats—through mud, pools of water, and heavy rain, shouting furiously; reaching it first, I jump in, seize my pistol, get to the horses' heads, and level it at the man, ordering Āghājān to tell him to get down immediately or I will shoot. This he does, but stands about defiantly, interfering with the horses our dumb little driver now brings up. Before I realise what is happening, Said seizes the brigand by the throat, and blacks both his eyes as neatly as possible. (It is never wise to threaten me, when Said is present.) The man does not lift a finger to defend himself, but with black glances pours out protestations that he has only come to aid us; these are eagerly interpreted by my trembling guide. In the meantime my driver calmly proceeds to harness the

very horses the other man had said did not belong to the post; while this is going on, the brigand pulls up his blouse, ostensibly to arrange his belt, but really to let me see a huge pistol stuck through two rows of cartridges. When the horses are ready, he attempts to mount the box in the driver's place; probably with the intention of attempting to rob us in a lonely spot, or perhaps of attacking Saïd with fists and pistol when out of sight of the city. I therefore pull my revolver out again; levelling it first at our driver, then at the other man, I order the one to drive, and the other to take the remaining horses back. This produces the required effect; but when the driver has got on the carriage and started, the brigand follows us, leading two horses and yelling lustily. After crossing a stream a few hundred yards ahead, I decide that it is time to oblige him to stop. Halting the carriage, I aim my pistol out of the rear window, and tell Āghājān to shout to the man that if he attempt to cross the stream, I shall fire. Disobeying my orders as usual, "lilly-livered" Āghājān jumps down, rushes back, and begins talking to the man with that childish air which in him is habitual. As I do not wish to shoot the cause of all this disturbance, Saïd and I decide that if he stir, we shall seize him from behind and throw him into the muddy stream. As he shows no signs of advancing, I order Āghājān to come back and start the carriage; before he obeys, I have to threaten to thrash him soundly. Finally

we make a third start,—I hanging out of the carriage with my pistol aimed at the ominous individual, who remains on the further bank until lost to sight. What his plans were, I shall never know; but it is certain that he intended harm.

It is nearly three o'clock by the time we get under way in heavy rain, crossing the plain by a road that is nothing more than a broad strip of mud full of pools and streams of water. After a little the Minār of Khusrawgird—all that is left of the ancient city—rises from the waste; a desolate tower of brick, adding one more touch of ruin to the dreary outlook. About half after four, we reach a particularly nasty caravanserai, whose keeper tries to persuade me to halt. The impossibility of ascertaining anything accurate about distances, is one of the trials of travel in this country; but the road having been tolerable so far, and this place supposedly half way to Rivand, which I wish to reach to-night, I see no reason for not continuing.

The road becomes worse and worse, finally losing itself in trackless mud, diversified by hummocks and gullies worn by what are now small torrents. The carriage rocks from side to side, straining fearfully. The plain spreads out on all hands of us—nothing but mud and sickly green earth, soaking in the downpour, while far away a wavering shroud of mist closes in. In the fast-gathering dark, this sodden table-land is a most repulsive sight. The gullies grow deeper and

wider as the mud increases, until it forms a veritable quagmire, holding as in a clamp the heavy carriage. The horses can only drag it a few hundred yards at a time, then stop to rest—panting loudly. Every few moments we stick fast, apparently for good. It is now raining so hard all the curtains have to be lowered; we struggle along in a sort of swaying tomb, with just enough space left clear in the door to see the darkness creeping closer and closer across the dank earth.

A sinking dragging sensation, then a sudden jerk; we have stuck fast beyond the possibility of extricating ourselves unaided—up to the axles at the edge of a swirling stream. It is now almost night, and I can see no way of finding the road (the driver of course has no lanterns) even if we manage to free the carriage. I therefore put the coachman on a horse about seven o'clock, and send him for assistance to the next relay, which he says is only distant a "little *farsakh*." This I do most reluctantly, since it is quite probable that even if he find horses, he will leave us here all night, rather than venture out into the storm a second time. I offer him and anyone he may bring back large tips, if they get us out of our predicament; then, with a sinking heart, watch him disappear in the dark. The rain has stopped, and—there being a moon behind the clouds—the plain is visible by a ghastly light that seems dead, a mere ghost of light, making the scene

more hideous than night itself could ever do. Here we are! stuck fast in the mud by night, in the midst of an uninhabited plain in the wildest part of Persia, with three horses pawing the water that runs between their hoofs; not a human being within miles, and Āghājān no more to be relied on than a puling child. Said is as usual splendid, keeping a level head and a cheerful manner.

About eight o'clock, resolving to make the best of bad luck, I have a lighted candle fastened to the opposite seat by its own grease, and start to dine on some of the food fortunately brought with us. I am just thinking that, inasmuch as it is not very cold, a night spent in the carriage will not be unendurable;—when a raging gale springs up like a flash, and drives a flood of rain hissing before it. The wind clutches the flimsy curtains on the sides of the carriage, tearing at them until they *slat* like wet sails. The candle is blown out by the first gust, plunging us in impenetrable darkness. The storm is so fierce, I cannot leave even Āghājān without a shelter, and have to bring him inside the carriage. It is soon evident that unless we hold the curtains fast, they will rip themselves free and leave us without any protection against the roaring elements. Said and I have to stand on each side, with our arms stretched out as far as possible, and hold the flapping corners of the muslin, while Āghājān looks after the door-curtain. Hours seem to crawl by as we crouch in cramped positions, clinging to the wildly shaking curtains, and

listening to the wind shriek and bound outside like an enraged animal. The rain gradually begins to trickle in through chinks and soaked surfaces. With the help of a match, I make out that it is a quarter past nine—two hours and a half since our driver left; trust in his return has now sunk very low. My only hope is that he will be afraid lest his horses die of exposure, and he have to take the consequences. Wind, rain, and cold, augment steadily. Sitting here late at night, caught in a bog on a deserted plain in a far country, during a storm increasingly furious, and with small prospect of relief,—is, I am free to confess, the most disagreeable experience travel has ever brought me.

The wind falls slowly, and the rain—that has probably soaked through the covers into the luggage—ceases. This brings some alleviation of our plight, and a return, if not of cheerfulness, at least of resignation. Said gets my electric pocket-lamp out of my valise, so that, in case anyone pass, we can see who it is; our revolvers have long been in readiness, since this part of the country is reputed unsafe. Āghājān is walking about beside the now restive horses, who paw and plash the running water. He maintains that he hears people coming toward us; as before we stuck fast, he also asserted that he saw Rīvān just ahead of us, and all his statements are unreliable,—his words do not arouse my hopes. When his shouts bring no reply, I am certain he is wrong; a few minutes

later, however, his call is answered. This is the most welcome sound I have ever heard. In a few minutes our driver trots into sight, accompanied by three extra horses and another man intelligent enough to have brought a spade and lantern.

By the dim light of my electric torch, the horses are reharnessed and the wheels dug free, all to the accompaniment of loud vociferation. Precisely at ten o'clock, the carriage is pulled out with wild shouts to encourage the horses, who dash up the opposite side of the gully. I think a prisoner newly liberated from gaol, could scarcely feel more elation than I. However, our troubles are by no means ended; we have only gone a short distance, when I hear an extraordinary swishing sound as the carriage halts; on looking out, I find we are in the middle of a wide stream swirling around our wheels. It looks as though we shall never get across; motionless in this dim light, the roar of water breaking the desolate silence, is most lugubrious. We manage to extricate ourselves somehow, and advance quite well, with one of the men riding behind us and driving two of the horses before him,—since no power on earth could make these Persian drivers harness all seven horses. Saïd has just remarked that the road is improving, when there is a frightful crash as the carriage slides to one side, topples over, and then stops suddenly. On getting out, I discover it has slipped down a bank the rain has washed in the road, and is now resting with one wheel up to the

hub in mud, and the other several feet higher up on the declivity. At first sight the front axle and spring appear to be broken; but, after several agonizing minutes, it turns out that the springs have merely been tilted forward in front of the axle-tree. After much digging and pulling, we are able to proceed, reaching Rīvand a little before midnight.

Having been told that this was a good place to spend the night, I expected a fairly decent caravanserai—like the one last night; but find only mud hovels. Crossing a manure bog and stumbling up a narrow flight of mud stairs outside the so-called house; I discover only one possible room—in which the proprietor and his wife were asleep when we arrived. I can only hope the cold may inhibit the activity of their invisible companions. In this room I have to lodge Saïd as well as myself, while the luggage is piled up in a nearby cave-room. However, this place seems palatial, when I think of the night I might have passed on the plain. After a fire has been lighted, which of course fills the room with smoke—not heat, and my blessed samovar has produced boiling water to make a cup of cocoa, cheerfulness returns. Saïd—whose resourceful disposition has been goaded to disgust by Āghājān's soft and unreliable ways—contemptuously christens him "l'artiste" on account of his—let us call them—imaginative statements. He has just gone to lecture "l'artiste" in the hope of rousing him into a semblance of

manhood. As I prepare to go to bed, I hear Saïd's deep voice laying down the law, successfully I trust.

March 5th

I was waked very early this morning by the sound of voices quarrelling in the street below, to find the sun struggling out—a most welcome sight. Āghājān appears to have been electrified by Saïd's lecture of last night; he is bustling about underneath my window, having the carriage roped up, while disputing with the green-turbaned head of the village. It seems that just outside the wall there is a piece of road, which last night's down-pour has made impassable. Āghājān has actually sent men to dig a way through, and improve it as best they can. Whilst I am looking out, a string of donkeys that have just waded through this place, comes into sight coated with mud half way up their flanks. The carriage having been straightened out as much as possible and loaded—the whole village watching the process—we start with four horses and two more following, escorted by the entire male population from old men to toddlers. A stone's throw beyond the last hovel, we reach the obstacle at a spot where the road passes between two banks upholding the wheat-fields on either side. Last night's flood—following several days of rain—has turned this place into a vast ditch, filled with a foot or two of soft mud covered by water. Here and there a few men are digging

mud out of the slough, with the entire village lined up on the banks, watching.

While we are waiting, and men are riding the extra horses up and down, in order to find the best place to attempt, and everyone is shouting advice; a battered victoria drawn by four horses, comes into view from the opposite direction. It halts to let the passengers alight; then the coachman whips up and dashes into the quagmire, his horses plunging wildly as they fling mud and water high into the air. They have almost reached the opposite end, when—with a sudden flop—the carriage settles up to the hubs in a mass of gluey mud. The driver flogs and screams, while the onlookers dash toward the horses, shouting furiously to start them. The poor beasts plunge and pull a few inches; then there is a resounding crash as the springs break, letting the whole carriage sink into the bog; whereupon the horses are unharnessed and groups of villagers start hauling out the broken victoria. One of the two passengers proves to be the head of the post relays at this village; he appears quite unconcerned—I suppose, because he is used to such things. He tells me that even if we succeed in passing this spot, there is a piece of road a few miles ahead, which we cannot possibly cross to-day in my rickety omnibus. He guarantees that, if I will stay the day here, he will mend my vehicle, start me off to-morrow with eight rested horses, and get me safely through. The carriage is in such

bad condition, I am quite ready to stop, and even wonder if it would not be wiser to return to Sabzawār where there is a blacksmith, and perhaps—so discouraged am I—from there turn back via Mashhad to the railway at Askābād. By noon I am re-installed in the dirty lodging I occupied last night. As the post-master is the first Persian I have met, who seems to have any knowledge or initiative, he inspires some confidence; so, after seeing the carriage trussed up with ropes and other contrivances, I decide to keep on to-morrow. The post-master tells me that the Governor of the province (who has been notified of my journey by the kindness of the British Consul at Mashhad) has wired to Sūdkhwār, the next stage, ordering that I be given an escort of honour consisting of fifty *suwārs*; but that—there being no more—twenty-five have been sent, of whom twenty turned back when I did not arrive last night. These figures are of course exaggerated, but there are probably one or two *suwārs* still waiting for me; which is encouraging, since it means men to help when in trouble. . . . The post has just arrived from Sabzawār, after taking nine hours to do the sixteen miles; it is to pass the night here, and to-morrow I am to accompany it. I am wondering what malign spirit prompted me to refuse the Governor's invitation to stay at Sabzawār, since I might have spent the night there—avoiding all my troubles—and been quite as far advanced now.

March 6th

It is still night when I rise at half past-four o'clock. The fire behaves worse than usual, filling the room so full of acrid smoke that I cannot dress, even when I crouch close to the floor. Consequently I have to fling the ruddy brands out into the blackness of the street below, and remain shivering with cold. Shortly after I am dressed, a wanness appears above the horizon, against which the great *chinār* tree in the courtyard is distinctly outlined, as well as another in the distance—on whose boughs a solitary fowl is perched. Then a redness slowly flushes the lower heavens, and the *chinārs* begin to glow as though made of radiant metal, while the stars recede from the fast-illumined sky. The horses are harnessed by seven o'clock (which is doing well) and we start, accompanying the post—a rude wooden waggon without springs, piled with sacks and guarded by two armed men besides the driver. When we reach yesterday's slough, conditions have improved; after endless consultation and the harnessing of two extra horses, the post-master takes the reins himself, and starts the team on a gallop through the mud and water. I watch his splashing progress with great anxiety, and give a deep sigh of relief when he reaches the end without mishap. Nevertheless, the precarious condition of the springs fills me with trepidation; my only hope lies in the numerous ropes with which they are braced. It is also encouraging to find that our

driver is the energetic fellow who came to the rescue night before last. To-day he is in full livery—that is to say, a shaggy Turkoman's bonnet; and is much pleased with himself when I take his photograph, because he is the first driver I have met in Persia possessed of anything like ordinary intelligence. Of course there are no signs of the four extra horses I was promised; but it has been agreed that the post shall travel with my carriage, lending horses and helping whenever necessary.

When we finally make a real start, the sun has just begun to peer over the earthen walls of Rīvand, gilding the sky with tints of pale yellow so luminous they force my eyes to drop. The plain is nearly dry, and the road—where there is one—fairly good. Every few hundred yards, however, the torrents that recently rushed down from the neighbouring mountains, have dug great gullies, sometimes several feet deep and often with steep sides. Bouncing into these and up the opposite bank, is dangerous—as well as difficult—in an old omnibus loaded with luggage and disabled by weak springs. At every gully that crosses the waggon-tracks—for that is what a road means—all of us have to get out; then my men and those from the post, dig out the wheels and level the edges when we are stuck, or else fill up the cut if sufficiently narrow. After that, often with an extra horse from the post, we struggle across amid wild shouts of encouragement; the

omnibus swaying, bounding, and creaking, every moment in imminent danger of breaking into bits. As this business has to be repeated every five or ten minutes, it is easy to imagine how slow and nerve-racking our progress really is. Once the post-waggon sticks in a gully, practically on end, with the horses perched on the bank above; from which interesting position it is only extricated with great difficulty. On one occasion Āghājān takes the reins, while the two drivers pull and whip; with his usual dexterity he almost turns the carriage over, bringing it to a halt in the worst possible position.

We are now in the midst of a great plain, bordered on each hand by hills, here and there tipped with snow, the plain of Mihr, where the "War of Religion"—so famous in Zoroastrian literature—occurred. Ahead of us the little range of serrated peaks around which the Iranians executed their victory-bearing flank movement, emerge from the level earth as suddenly as volcanic islands from the sea. It is strange to think that this dreary and almost uninhabited plateau, across which we are advancing so painfully, was in prehistoric days the scene of actions whose fame still lingers. A little after ten o'clock a troupe of horsemen—followed by a post-waggon—gallops up, headed by an extraordinary individual, wearing a Bedouin's headdress and around his arm a vermilion band with the Turkish star and crescent. On dismounting, his appearance and manner are—if

possible—still more curious; he tells me, in an impossible French jargon, that he is a Young Turkish journalist from Constantinople, on his way to Kābul. I cannot help wondering why he wishes to enter the forbidden land, Afghanistan, and how he will manage to do so. The first Young Turk I have ever seen, does not impress me very favourably. He is accompanied by five *suwārs*, two escorting him and three sent to meet me. They are rather less shabby than usual, particularly one who rejoices in a pair of European russet-leather boots and a young horse. I am glad to have them arrive, not for the sake of their dubious protection, but because they make it possible to send for help if needed, or even ride ahead myself on one of their horses. They report that five of the Turkomen whose raids have made the road insecure, have recently reappeared and are now being pursued in the mountains. Unless the Turkomen are arrant cowards, they are certain to escape; for everything leads me to believe that Persian character and courage have not changed since the days of Haji Baba. Indeed, Morier's famous phrase, based on the actual word of a Persian general:—"O Allah, Allah, if there was no dying in the case, how the Persians would fight!"—was paralleled a very short time ago by a Persian officer who, to the enquiry why he had not ordered his men to advance, replied: some of them might have been killed.

Shortly before reaching Sūdkhwār, three gazelles

chased by a dog bound across the road. My escort pursues them, firing several times; but fortunately the graceful leaping creatures escape their harriers in the hills across the plain. We arrive at the relay about eleven o'clock to my intense relief, as each stage ended without mishap to the carriage, is a weight off my mind. An empty carriage is standing by the post-house, but proves to be in even worse condition than mine. I take my luncheon on the floor in a house that belongs to the *suwārs*, with one of them seated opposite, watching me. He knows just enough French to make me understand that his native tongue is Turkish, and that he has been brought from Tih-rān by the Governor of this province; his eyes and bearing show that—like most of the men—he smokes opium in his tobacco. To be an object of curiosity and constant inspection, I find most embarrassing. Probably I shall soon learn to endure the stare of searching eyes with perfect indifference; at present, however, when every gesture is watched by silent spectators, my food sticks in my throat, and makes me sympathise with small children who bellow under the gaze of strangers.

When I leave, my former escort refuses a tip (to me a novel experience) because I am their master's guest. Four new men—poor shabby devils like the rest of their ill-fed and unpaid fellows—accompany me on lank quivering horses. The shabbiness of these Persians is too pitiful to

be ludicrous; they certainly are wretched specimens of humanity, but it is impossible not to commiserate them, since in no country I have ever visited is there such abject misery as here. The new driver is an idiot who takes chances in bad places, so every minute I am expecting the springs to break. This anxiety makes travel detestable, as does the ceaseless tying and re-tying, breaking and mending, of the century-old collection of rotten string supposed to be harness. The horses are always untrained and badly harnessed; though broken down—being stallions—they neigh, kick, and rear, giving as much trouble as thoroughbreds. In place of real whips, the drivers have nothing but a little stick with a yard or so of string, which makes no noise and is only used to thrash the horses unmercifully; whenever one of them misbehaves, the driver jumps down, and—until stopped by me—flogs the poor beast about the head in a manner as brutal as it is stupid. This time we have only gone a short distance, when, while walking, I notice that one of the horses has a horrible raw wound under the collar. The driver watches my attempts to lessen its misery, with the passive scorn one might bestow on the vagaries of a spoiled child. It is impossible to return, since the post will not wait for me, and also useless, since the next traveller would take the same horse; all I can do, is to pad the collar with my handkerchief; but the thought of this wretched animal with his wounded neck

pressed against the burning collar as he struggles along, adds new distress to the journey.

The road improving gradually as the mountains, which send down the destructive torrents, grow lower, the carriage finally reaches Mazīnan intact. The first thing to do, however, is to have it doctored, since the town boasts a so-called blacksmith; in the midst of a curious crowd, which probably does not see a *fīrangī* (foreigner) once a year, all the local talent is called in to straighten and reinforce the springs. The walled town is entered by a large arch leading into a long street, where a few trees grow beside a dirty rivulet running down the middle. Camels and donkeys crowd about this gateway so thickly, it is hard to pick one's way; further along, strips of light and darker green stuffs—freshly dyed—hang across the street in great festoons. There being no caravanserai, I lodge in a house on the outskirts of the town, where a fairly clean room with a miraculous fire-place that does not smoke, gives on a court for once free from manure. Walking on the roof, I can see a waxing moon shine in a cloudless sky, strewn with glittering stars everywhere, except close to the horizon. Looking across courtyards enclosed by mud roofs with tiny domes—like bubbles in breadcrust, I can distinctly see the white cap of a single snow-peak, hanging without apparent support above the empty darkness, precisely as Fujiyama is drawn in the colour-prints of Hokusai.

March 7th

Āghājān having last night been threatened with dire penalties, if he did not have the samovar boiling by four-thirty A.M., slept soundly—although the alarm-clock which Saïd placed beside his head, must have rung loudly. Fortunately I woke before five myself, and managed to rouse him by pounding on his door, and shouting a string of oaths—the only thing I have found effective. From the roof-terrace the sky is visible, veiled with grey except toward the eastern horizon, where a ruddy bronze cloud is hanging, with a few trees traced on it in lines of black. When my kit is ready, dawn has come but not the sun. Two men precede me between the mud walls of a narrow street, carrying the luggage slung on their backs by ropes across the shoulders—a living illustration for ‘Umar’s verses:

“And then they jogg’d each other, ‘Brother! Brother!
Now for the Porter’s shoulder-knot a-creaking.’”

Each day furnishes new impediments to an early departure, but this morning’s is most unusual. On reaching the gates, we find them fastened by a padlock and heavy chain, which permit the doors to open far enough for a man to pass—so marauders could perfectly well enter by night—but not wide enough for my kit to be carried through. Āghājān, who has preceded us by some minutes, is rushing about helplessly, since the keeper of the keys is not to be found at

any of his habitual haunts. This is maddening, despite my now large experience of the annoyances incident to Persian travel. The doors stoutly withstand every effort Said and I can make to pick the lock, or break the chain with stones. Finally a man with the key appears from nowhere; but it is impossible to discover whether he is a culprit, who deserves to be scolded for forgetting to open the gate, or a benefactor who has fetched the key.

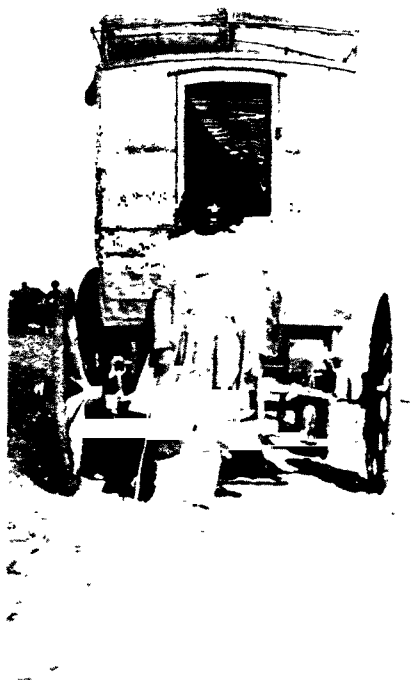
The carriage is loaded and ready to start about seven—only one hour late! It has been patched up, but so badly I realise it can never reach Shāhrūd, where I had hoped to find another. Rather than put up with unceasing anxiety, lest the carriage break down at every bump or gully we cross; I decide to take a *fourgon*, like the post-wagon, as soon as I can find one. No matter how torturing its lack of springs may prove, it cannot be worse than my present worries. There are many ruined villages scattered along the road, some of their remains—I believe—of great antiquity. We are still crossing one of those barren plains which apparently constitute the greater part of Persia; skirting low hills to the right, with a lake-like accumulation of shallow water on the left. About ten we reach a caravan-serai, where the *sawārs* have a post. As there are no relays here and three *farsakhs* to go before reaching one, the horses are taken out to be fed and rested—whereupon I discover that one of

them is horribly galled. The sight of these maimed creatures is beginning to make my trip a nightmare. Whilst waiting, the *suwārs* of my past and future escort invite me into a small but rather clean room, stir the smouldering fire, and bring me tea. The chief who is to accompany me, appears to be something like a lieutenant, and is in his green uniform the first to have any pretence to trimness. He has raven hair, curling about his ears in the two locks Persians still affect, although many of them—as far as I can tell—no longer shave their heads; he is bronzed, with a cast of features reminding me of the pictures of Darius Codomannus in history-books.

When we leave, the *suwārs* escort us, galloping in front of and behind my carriage and the still faithful post-waggon. The scenery is extremely monotonous—a desert strewn with hummocks on which leprous plants make grey spots, with occasional salt deposits forming white patches easily mistaken for snow. The only break in the monotony occurs at the Pūl-i-Abrasham, a bridge which once marked the boundary between the provinces of Irāq and Khurāsān. About one o'clock, we pass a military outpost built on a hill to protect 'Abbās Ābād against raiding Turkomen; here I am offered tea in tiny glasses on saucers, with little spoons standing in them and many lumps of sugar at the bottom. While I am drinking it, my escort indulges in noisy refreshment inside the tower. After trotting up and around

the shoulder of a hill, 'Abbās Ābād comes into sight opposite but below us—a collection of the usual mud houses built on a mound, up which they rise in several tiers, with a flag making a scarlet spot over the principal gate. I know that this is the place Shāh 'Abbās founded with a colony of Christians transported from Georgia, who afterwards became Muslims; but this bare historic fact fails to invest with interest a commonplace town. This is often the case; yet travellers are to-day so eager to revivify history and arouse sensation by giving the imagination a free rein, that they frequently attempt to be thrilled, when it were wiser to realise how the past sometimes vanishes beyond recall. Be this as it may, 'Abbās Ābād leaves me unmoved.

When we enter the town, I find—to my surprise—the greater part of the inhabitants lined up to await my arrival, which they greet with deep bows. On alighting, the first thing I do, is to search for a *fourgon*; to my relief I discover a solid one, which I soon persuade the bare-legged post-master to give me in place of my tottering omnibus. Then I am told that the chief official of the town and the captain of the *suwārs* are waiting to receive me; so I march off like a potentate, followed by a gaping crowd and flanked by lines of spectators. After crossing a neglected court, I am ushered into a small octagonal room, where light only enters through the door and an aperture in the roof; its floor and walls are covered with carpets.



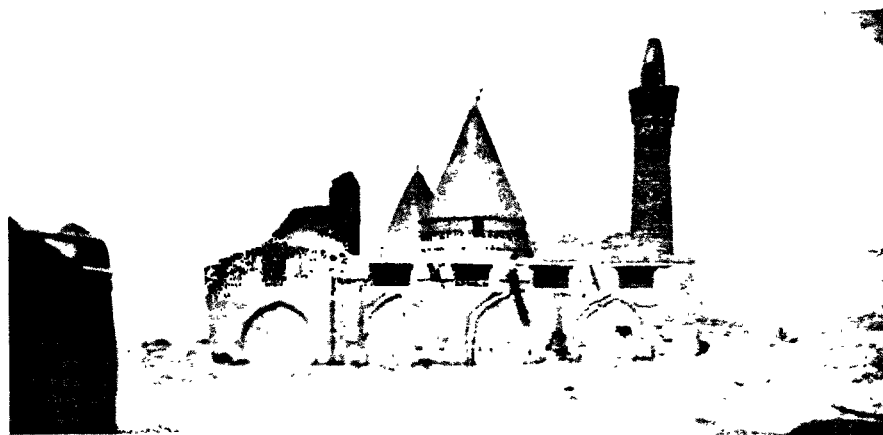
A Persian Post Driver in Full Livery
(This is the only intelligent driver I encountered in Persia.)



Carrying the Mail in Khurāsān
The Post-Waggon in Difficulties



Exchanging a Broken Diligence for a Springless Fourgon, 'Abbās Ābād



The Burial-Place of Bāyazīd, Saint and Mystic, Bustām

Three or four men are standing to receive me, none of whom can speak a word of anything but Persian; after many interpreted salutations, I take a seat on the floor cross-legged, leaning on one of the three cushions placed against the wall. Sitting cross-legged in stocking-feet like the Orientals, is all very well; but with blackened boots, it is a painful and soiling position. Growing used to the semi-obscurity, I begin to distinguish the features of those present. When various politenesses have been exchanged through Āghājān, he goes to look after the luggage; in order to lessen the embarrassment which enforced silence makes me feel, and also to shield myself from my hosts' unwavering scrutiny,—I take the officer's child on my knees, making tolerable friends with this chubby young Persian. Before long a servant enters, says a few words to the officer (among which I recognise the word, *post*), then withdraws. In a moment the little man who has guarded the mails since Rīvand, appears in the doorway, removes his shoes, wipes his hands on his handkerchief, and crosses the room. He next kneels in front of the captain, takes his hands, and bows low enough to kiss both knees; the officer then raises the man's hands to his own heart in acknowledgment of the salutation, and allows him to retire.

Āghājān now reappears to announce that lunch is ready, which I was not expecting. Passing into the next room, I find an elaborate meal laid out on

the floor, according to the real Persian custom. A large green cloth covers the whole carpet, except a space near the walls where the guests are to sit. In the centre is a large glass of water, from which all who wish may drink; the edges are bordered with the strips of thin bread, which appear to be indispensable at any respectable Persian repast. The table or rather floor-cloth is thickly covered with dishes—for the most part, bowls of all sizes and shapes—filled with edibles such as were served at Nishāpūr. The principal dish is of course a *pilaw*, with which the other foods are mixed. For me a spoon, knife, and fork have been provided; the others eat with their fingers in true Persian fashion, leaning toward or crouching over the food, which they toss into their mouths and swallow with extreme rapidity. Please yourself is the motto; each man helps himself to whatever he wishes, whenever he chooses, leaving the room as soon as finished. There is no disregard of others in this custom, since everyone is equally at liberty to do as he pleases; moreover, if the table-manners lack the polish to which Occidentals are accustomed, the sincere hospitality and courteous intentions are admirable. After luncheon tea is served again, Persians seeming to surpass even Russians in their ability to drink unlimited quantities of *chai*. Being guest of honour, I am always given the largest glass; so the amount of tea which I absorb, must be enormous.

As soon as it is polite to do so, I make the move to leave, being anxious to continue my journey. I find that Saïd has had the luggage transferred to the *fourgon*, and has arranged it cleverly, with my bed and two valises forming a low-backed throne, on which it is possible to sit quite comfortably. After exchanging elaborate salutations with my amiable hosts, we start—Saïd and I perched on the throne, exactly like the mediæval Russians in one of Rimsky-Korsakov's legendary operas. As the road from here to Miāmaï is still supposed to be dangerous on account of frequent raids by Turkomen, my escort is numerous and headed by the chief of the *suwārs* in person. He is a tall lithe man, with sharp black eyes, an aquiline nose, and a deeply bronzed complexion—a living personification of Don Quixote. He wears a green jacket and trousers; the former almost hidden under a leather cuirass full of cartridges, the latter held in place by leggings but little higher than anklets. His feet are shod with "prunella" boots, whose outstanding tabs—with Russian letters—betray their origin. On his head is a curious white felt hat, the brim of which has been cut in two, so one half can be turned up behind until it touches the high stiff crown, while the other forms a long visor. He is riding a white stallion, nobly formed and daintily stepping, without a coloured hair on his whole body, except his tail dyed flame-red with henna, precisely like the horses in old Persian miniatures. It may seem

grotesque, but this one flamboyant touch of colour on the snow-white animal, is as beautiful as it is striking. The saddle-trappings are of embroidered cloth, with a long cord, finished by a tassel, almost trailing on the ground on either side; underneath the saddle is a tawny spotted leopard's fell, entirely covering the horse's crupper, with a paw dangling on each flank, and the tail hanging beside the horse's. Around the neck—just behind the ears—is a collar filled with cartridges, two by two; another, with a long fringe of swaying leather cords, staring from the pommel, encircles the chest. This splendid charger paces along—as though dancing—on slender legs that look like springing steel, tossing a head as small and finely shaped as any Phidias carved, at the same time bending his beautiful neck and clipped mane. With his picturesque rider erect in the saddle, this curvetting stallion—his leopard skin, tassels, and fringes, swinging from side to side as he arches his gaudy tail streaming proudly in the wind—is a sight I never expected to see outside of some exquisite miniature wrought to captivate the magnificent Shāh 'Abbās; it is also the first beautiful or unusual one I have seen since entering Persia.

Our procession is headed by a *suwār* with a jacket of pinkish purple, of which all but the sleeves and skirt are hidden by a cartridge-cuirass. He is leading the officer's extra horse—a fine jet-black creature, over whose saddle is thrown a

vermilion cloth richly embroidered about the border. Then come in succession: the captain, the escort, my *fourgon*, and the post. The road rises slightly but steadily, winding across a barren plain, until it reaches a desert upland full of sandy hillocks, now spreading out, now enclosing the road in a narrow gorge. The dust-brown or greenish earth is denuded of all vegetation, with the exception of dried clumps of grass and a kind of thorn-bush covered with purplish blossoms, so minute they form a haze of mauve around the bare and angular twigs. The sun, now burning hot, shines directly in our faces, suffusing all things with a glittering mist of gold. Advancing up this strange land of barren hills, preceded by armed horsemen six abreast, headed by a scarlet-caparisoned lead-horse and an officer mounted on a white stallion, sweeping from side to side his incredible tail,—is a striking experience.

The road now begins to ascend perceptibly, and the monticules turn into hills of respectable size, undulating away row upon row. At the small fortified village of Alḥaqq, we stop for a half-hour to rest the horses, and refresh ourselves with omnipresent glasses of sugared tea. The captain tells me—through Āghājān—that some seven months ago a band of nine hundred Turkomen raided these parts, of whom he and his men killed seven hundred; that he has affixed the head of a Turkoman over the entrance of every caravan-serai (I have seen none) as a warning to marauders;

that he is obliged to be on the watch day and night, and has often been four days in the mountains without food for himself or his horse; and finally that he has just received news of five hundred Turkomen advancing on this part of the country. Shades of Haji Baba! I can almost hear your voice, and could well believe that time has reverted a hundred years. This Tamburlaine is certainly a most picturesque fellow and very courteous; but I should place more reliance on the powers of his tongue than on the valour of his fighting. If my thoughts do him wrong, may I be forgiven.

As we mount a steep ascent, the sun has begun to sink, and clouds have gathered in threatening masses, streaked by black shreds of trailing rain. Between the farthest range of hills and the edge of the rain-shedding clouds, a group of mountains is faintly visible in the far distance—glazed with pale green reflections, and sharply outlined against a sky of aquamarine filled with small white clouds. Viewing the pallor of this aqueous green landscape through the narrow space between sombre hills and still blacker sky, seems like peering into a world under the ocean. Far behind—where the storm has not yet gathered—the sun slants toward the barren plain, tinging it with rose, lavender, and mauve. Ahead of us from time to time, the figures of a man and a grazing horse appear on the highest hill-crests, sharply silhouetted against the raven sky. They are sentinels (on the

watch for marauding Turkomen) whose presence brings a realisation that the danger of travel in this part of Persia, is not altogether imaginary. As we pass, they jump on their horses, gallop down the steep inclines, and, after saluting, report to the captain. As we proceed, under heavens darkening more and more, these hill-perched sentinels appear with greater frequency and in larger groups. Several times upon receiving their report, the officer orders our driver and the driver of the post-waggon—which is following us with five armed men seated on the mail-sacks—to drive as fast as possible, since there is danger. The cold has become unpleasant, and in front the rain is trailing down in great fringes of blue-black, advancing rapidly until they wrap us in a heavy shower, half water, half hail.

Night has now all but fallen; more than once a watcher's tent appears on the summit of a hill beside a red-gold fire, flickering against gathering shadows among which sentinels stand out vaguely. Rattling along this desolate road in a remote country, followed by the armed post, as night moves across the hills amid gusts of rain, with watchmen visible on every crest, and an officer urging us into a gallop through the sinister dark to avoid possible danger of attack,—is quite thrilling. Gradually the storm withdraws, allowing the long-risen half moon to shine out of an expanse of azure sky, where—it would seem—glittering stars move swiftly past immobile clouds.

Day has insensibly changed into a moon-lit night, whose pallid radiance beautifies the barren hills. The cold has grown intense enough to make me eager to exchange this noisy jolting waggon for shelter. Straight ahead of us, solid black storm-clouds are still advancing slowly, until a sudden flash of lightning dashes down the sky in a flame of jagged white. The moon is hidden again, the cold increases, and the relay seems interminably far off. At last a second flash of lightning rives the dark, revealing for one instant the walls of the caravanserai; then a light appears where kneeling camels are encamped with their drivers outside the walls. Passing on, we find the road huddled with bleating sheep, then finally enter the court just as rain patters down once more.

I am led through the blackness of a vaulted passage into a second enclosure, where mud hovels cluster—just visible by moonlight filtering through the clouds. The only room to be had is a nasty kind of half-cave, half-prison (its shutterless windows barred with iron) where wind and filth abound. When in moving it, I break the feeble lamp and have to wait ten minutes in complete darkness before anyone comes, my traveller's courage ebbs to its lowest. After Said has arranged things as best he can, and a not too smoky fire has been lighted and something to eat has with infinite difficulty been secured; I go to bed with a wry smile.

March 8th

Āghājān had my fire lighted at a half after four, still the dead of night—but, despite dire threats, did not have porters and horses ready to leave at six o'clock. Men to carry my kit to the carriage, only appeared after I had shaken him by the shoulders, and had gone to the stable myself in search of the driver. Polite signs that I wished the horses brought out proving fruitless, I returned to the long dim vault of a stable. Finding the driver seated on a high platform, leisurely smoking and drinking tea; I took a running leap, landed on the platform in the middle of the indolent group, seized my driver by the collar, and—amid consternation and screams of *shaitān* (the devil)—threw him off and banged his head against one of the horses. After this they were immediately brought out. A few more weeks of travel in Persia, and I shall have much sympathy for the *shaitān* to whom I have just been so kindly compared.

About seven we leave this loathsome caravan-serai, with a just-risen sun driving the mists away, while to the right across the now golden plain, remote peaks of snow stand out. They sink, like icebergs in a Polar ocean, to what—by a curious play of cloud and shadow—appears to be a shallow lake, extending to the mountains that bound the horizon ahead of us. The captain and his *sawārs* are not ready, but soon overtake us; the post, however, fails to put in an appearance—which no

longer matters. Persian luck has given me one horse that must be suffering from some horrid disease, since it exhales a stench beyond endurance. When I can bear it no longer, I ask Don Quixote to have one of his men lend me a horse and take my place in the cart. To my relief, this is done at once, but I find riding a Persian saddle—which is a wooden letter V with a high pommel, padded with cloth—rather painful, particularly as it forces me to take an unaccustomed position, and has very short stirrups.

The road ascends through a narrow gorge between burnt hills, still dotted with not infrequent sentinels—this being a much dreaded stage. After passing two *fourgons*, loaded with currency for the bank at Mashhad and escorted by an armed guard of Persian Cossacks, we arrive at a large square fortification with a round entrance-tower; beside a flag-pole, peering over the gateway battlements, is a stuffed hyena—rather a ghastly sight. There is a coming and going of *suwārs*; then six of them line up and blow me a salute on very shrill trumpets; after which I am led to a room in the tower, where I find the officer who is to accompany me the next stage, and a Persian travelling with the convoy to Mashhad. After taking leave of the picturesque braggart, who has headed my guard since yesterday, we start again about eleven o'clock. My escort is now reduced to two men besides the new officer, but he is a host in himself—a broad-shouldered giant with an almost black

face, who wears real riding boots neatly made, and carries a pistol slung across his cartridge-cuirass by a golden baldric. He is riding an iron-grey stallion, with saffron saddle-cloth and tassels, his four fetlocks dyed with henna to almost the same shade as the trappings; and sits his mount superbly as though horse and man were one, the very image of Othello or a fierce Renaissance *condottiere*. We reach Miāmaī about noon. On the hills above the village, there are ruins of old fortifications—supposed to date from the Irano-Turanian wars—which were visited by the English traveller, Fraser, in the winter of 1833, but as far as I know by no one since. Before commencing this journey, it was my firm intention to climb these hills and see what is left of the strongholds; my archæological enthusiasm has, however, been annihilated by the strain of such travelling as this; so I decide to push on to Shāhrūd to-night—after declining my officer's courteous invitation to stay at his house. An escort no longer being necessary, we start alone across one of those eternal plains I am beginning to hate bitterly. Storm-clouds lour on all sides, until at last hail and rain overtake us. At the next relay, much scolding and a long dispute secure five horses to help me reach Shāhrūd, the residence of the Governor of the province, whose guest I am to be. I have learned that he is absent at Samnān; but knowing that I will be less uncomfortable in an important town than in a roadside caravanserai, am eager to arrive before dark.

After a long stretch of changeless scenery, we come in sight of high mountains draped in snow and clouds. In a cleft between the two highest peaks, vapour is piled in a mound like snow, with clear sky above. Far ahead are mountains of dull blue, entirely in shadow, but with rays from the cloud-hidden sun slanting into the folds between the spurs, filling them with golden haze. At their base, a blue-green band of trees conceals the town of Shāhrūd. The coachman rattles along at a good pace, until—about six o'clock—we reach a village where a group of *suwārs* is waiting to receive me. One youth with an almost black complexion, wears under the usual long brown coat a robe of vivid indigo, contrasting with his high bonnet of bright gamboge; he is holding a dapple-grey horse, with a silver cord and tassel fastened around its neck behind the ears, and a broad silver collar around its shoulders. He looks as though about to appear in a Russian ballet. When we start again, my escort is headed by a rider holding a silver rod almost five feet long—used in these parts as a sign of honour. Cavalrymen gallop up from every direction, until we are surrounded by at least fifteen. The sun is setting as we dash across the plain, but when we draw near Shāhrūd the moon floods the scene with its subdued radiance. The driver appears excited by my cavalcade and silver wand of honour, so I make a princely entry sitting on a throne of luggage, clinging for dear life to the side of my

springless old waggon, as it dashes along with a furious creaking of wood and clanking of chains, in the midst of caracoling horsemen. This dramatic arrival, the most sensational I have ever made, amuses me by its combination of the picturesque and the ridiculous. It appears that I was to have been lodged at the country-seat of the Amīr X., a few miles outside the town; however, on account of the lateness of the hour, I am taken to the house of one of his retainers hard at hand within the walls. Here after a long wait, much arranging of my luggage, and a general scurrying to and fro, I have my dinner—seated cross-legged on the floor opposite a white-haired and courteous old man, with whom I cannot exchange a single word.

March 9th

My first move this morning is to try and secure some sort of a carriage in place of my jolting *fourgon*; this I fortunately succeed in doing. Then the Amīr's representative, the Governor of the town, and several notabilities, come to call on me. After prolonged formalities exchanged through Āghājān (no one who has not tried it, can imagine the irritation of talking through an interpreter) the Governor and I drive off in the Amīr's carriage, a real but somewhat neglected brougham, which here seems curiously out of place. Our objective point is the old city of Bustām, illustrious as the home and burial place of the great Sūfī mystic,

Bāyazīd, whose loving charity toward all life, legend has symbolised in the following hyperbole:—having ended a long journey, he discovered a number of ants on some grain brought from his starting-point; whereupon he retraced his entire road, in order that he might return the tiny creatures to the home whence he had unwittingly carried them. Leaving Shāhrūd behind us at the foot of bare pointed hills, we cross a sterile plain lying in an amphitheatre; on the one hand, tawny hills of crumbled earth and rock, absolutely bare of vegetation, but toothed and graven by the erosion of untold centuries; on the other, high mountains—so dark an olive as to appear black—tipped and streaked with snow, where banks of clouds fill the valleys with veils of shining white. Far away above Shāhrūd, an immense white chain rears itself above the nearer mountains. It is bold barren scenery, whose acrid beauty would readily exalt mystic thought. It is not unlike those stringent Castilian landscapes, the very aridity of which enflames their lovers as nothing else ever can; landscapes that aroused the mystic ardour of saints (Theresa of Jesus and John of the Cross) until it leaped toward God like a flame springing sun-ward from the summit of a barren mountain. Only scenes such as this seem propitious to transcendental seekings, for I can recall no example of a great mystic reared among the graces of luxuriant vegetation. It is strange to think that a thousand years ago, in this remote and now abandoned spot,

Bāyazīd looked out toward these bitter hills, and wrote:—"I went from God to God, until they cried from me in me, 'O Thou I!'"

"When God loves a man, He endows him with three qualities in token thereof: a bounty like that of the sea, a sympathy like that of the sun, and a humility like that of the earth."

And again:—"Notwithstanding that the lovers of God are separated from Him by their love, they have the essential thing, for whether they sleep or wake, they seek and are sought, and are not occupied with their own seeking and loving, but are enraptured in contemplation of the Beloved."

Then, as now, many must ardently have longed to know whether such ideas represent Truth, or are only the spinning of an over-subtle brain.

Bustām is fortified with walls of dried clay, crowned by a curious series of sharp points pierced with holes. The colour and material of this and all other Persian towns, make them seem a part of the earth in a way buildings never do in other lands. At the city-gate, a number of men are waiting to receive us and lead the way to the house where we are to lunch. We pass through narrow unpaved streets, enclosed by high walls of dried mud; the lack of houses with visible doors and windows, and the complete absence of all signs of domestic life, create in this and in all Oriental cities a secret and mysterious atmosphere that no Occidental, who has not visited the East,

can conceive. When the house is reached, the entire company seats itself on chairs around a long table; there then ensues one of those interminable waits, during which my inability to converse without an interpreter, makes me horribly ill at ease. The chief notability finally arrives; an elderly man—looking as though he had just stepped out of a miniature—with keen eyes and sharp features, that give him rather a distinguished air. He is wearing a spotless white turban, and a long cloak lined with fur, over an under robe of lavender grey; and leans slightly on a cane. A most elaborate lunch is served on the floor of the next room, during which I find the habit of slinging food into the mouth and gulping it with frequent eructations somewhat trying. Notwithstanding this, I have nowhere been treated with more perfect consideration.

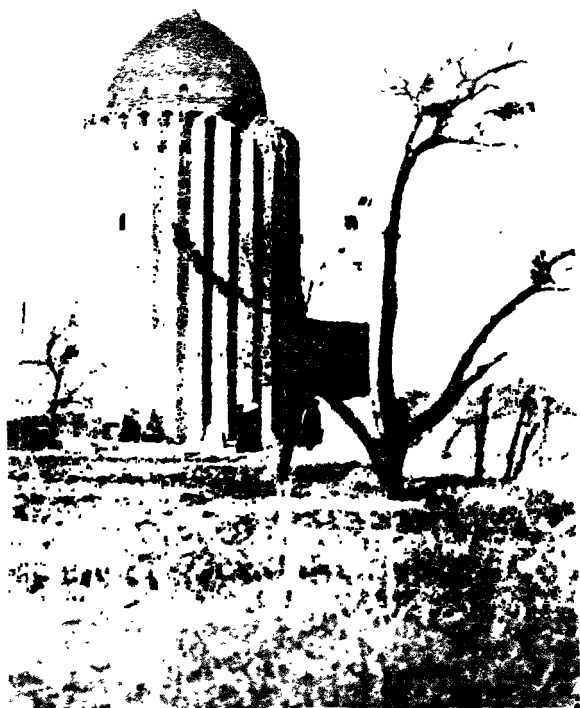
When the meal is ended, the entire party starts out to show me the town, with the greater part of the inhabitants following us in silence to watch that unusual animal—a foreigner. We first visit the picturesque ruins of an old mosque, with a most curiously built tower, whose former use I am completely unable to ascertain. This inability to converse or make enquiries is extremely trying, since nothing can be extracted from the broken phrases of an interpreter, who only knows the English required in travelling. The view from the mosque-roof over the house-walls to the Shrine of



The Burial-Place of Bāyazīd from the Mosque Roof, Bustām



A Group of Notabilities, Bus'tām



A Tower beside the Mosque, Bustām



Watching a Firangī at the Tomb of Bāyazīd, Bustām

Bāyazīd, with its enamelled cones shining in the sun beside the curious minaret, is very picturesque. A few leafless trees make a tracery of soft grey; and earth, houses, and distant hills, are all a golden brown under the various greys and pearl of clouds idling across a sunny sky.

The shrine is a small, half-ruinous group of buildings enclosed by a wall of mud bricks, out of which four grated apertures peer like eyes. It is dominated by two cones covered with falling tiles—one of which has its metal finial rakishly bent to one side—and an elaborately patterned minaret, that sways visibly when a man climbs to the top and rocks backwards and forwards. I have great difficulty discovering in which of these places Bāyazīd is supposed to be buried; but decide it must be on a roof where a comparatively modern alabaster slab has been erected. I am also shown a dark cell, where the saint is supposed to have remained in prayer. If he ever used it, he must have had the habits of a mediæval ascetic or a Hindu fakir. While I am wandering about the precincts, all the boys and young men perch on top of a ruined wall like crows, eying me in silence. After passing through a picturesque court in the old fortress, where three trees mirror their unbudding boughs in a pool of rain water; I am shown a pleasure garden of the Amīr's, which is truly Persian, inasmuch as the pavilion is falling to pieces although not yet completed.

March 10th

As my escort will not accept tips when I am their master's guest, I sent Āghājān yesterday for the chief of the *suwārs* who accompanied me into Shāhrūd from the village where they had awaited my arrival two days, and requested him to give them a feast last night at my expense. With the probable connivance of Āghājān, the head *suwār* announced that he had disbursed what seemed for these parts a very large sum. I would have paid the amount with pleasure, if certain the men got the benefit of it; the chances are that most of it found its way into the pockets of Āghājān and the head *suwār*. It having been suggested that the one thing which would make the men entirely happy, was arrack—a bad kind of brandy—I procured some from a dirty Jew after quite a search; on which they undoubtedly got gloriously drunk, despite their religion. I was asked to come and permit the men to drink my health, but could not do so, as the Governor came to visit me just at that time. We had a long and rather interesting conversation—despite difficulties—in the course of which he expressed feelings of particular cordiality toward America. Much of this was no more than politeness; yet I have reason to infer that Mr. Shuster made a profound impression in Persia, and that—as a countryman of his—I am received with especial courtesy. The Governor told me that the Russian agent here had been making searching enquiries about me since my

arrival; and went on to express the deepest sorrow for the Russian seizure of Northern Persia, as well as a hatred of Russia, in which he assured me the very children participate. I do not pretend to judge, but the Persians impress me as a race hopelessly decadent, and I cannot believe them able to administer their own affairs decently; nor can I, the world being what it is, blame the Great Powers for acting as they have; nevertheless, Persia—exploited by her children and by foreigners alike, while her autonomy has become no more than a shabby fiction—is certainly in a position between the nether and upper mill-stones of Great Britain and Russia, as pitiable as it is iniquitous. While the Governor was still here, the Persian equivalent of curfew was blown at ten o'clock on a very tinny trumpet, by a man standing on the terrace of this house. The laws of the Prophet forbidding the use of wine, seem perennially ineffectual; both nights since I have been here, one of the servants has been drunk; about three o'clock this morning, he pounded on the door and yelled to be let in—loudly enough to raise the dead as well as myself.

The carriage in which I leave Shāhrūd at about eight o'clock, is even more remarkable and far more ramshackle than the one in which I ventured to start from Mashhad. It is a kind of lumbering omnibus, which a partition divides in two; the front half has seats facing forwards and backwards, but those in the rear run sideways. The roof is so

low, my head almost touches it when seated, and the whole affair is in the last stages of decay—but the springs seem solid. Some of the luggage is lashed on the roof, and the rest piled up in the rear compartment with “the artist” sitting on top of it; while Saïd and I occupy very close quarters in front, where a partition behind the driver makes it impossible to see straight ahead. The horses are a little better than usual, carrying us along at a good pace over what was the last stage of Alexander’s march in pursuit of Darius—“the road that was desert for lack of water,” and desert it has remained to this day; a great plain with hardly a rise or fall, dust-coloured and strewn with rocks. On either side it is hemmed in by a low range of hills that has—in one place—been half washed away, until nothing is left but a rufous cliff turning sanguine near the crest. At the first relay, a large village stretches away in every direction, with leafless trees rising above the earthen walls, and a few spots of white or rosy haze showing where early fruit trees are in bloom—the first I have seen.

The scenery is now much like the Algerian desert, an uncultivated plateau bordered by pointed lion-coloured hills. A howling gale springs up suddenly, raging past and making it bitterly cold—even when wearing two overcoats, one of fur. At the midday halt the *chai khāna* is too filthy to lunch in, so I have to eat out-of-doors as best I can, clutching my food lest the wind

carry it off. Shortly after starting, the two minarets of Dāmghān become visible. The wind now howls past, racing the dust across the desert in white clouds. As we near the town, a band of *sawārs* suddenly appears from nowhere behind the carriage, and rides past saluting. None of these Persian soldiers or police or whatever they really are, have anything that could possibly masquerade as a uniform; but several of these particular men are neatly dressed with quite a military air. A number have good horses; all of them with the terrible Persian bridle of Arab origin, that has—in addition to an ordinary bit—an iron ring encircling the lower jaw, which it could easily break if pulled hard. We all gallop along—even my horses and driver being spurred on by the escort—and reach Dāmghān about four o'clock.

The road—a rough track—leads between the usual mud-walls, frequently in ruin. Once I catch a glimpse, down a lane, of a tower of golden brick soaring out of rosy fruit-boughs. After passing close to a dilapidated mosque, with a buff minaret of richly ornamented brick lacking its terminal cage; my escort halts the carriage and leads me a short distance to the house prepared by the Governor's order. Entering through a narrow vaulted passage, I find myself in a clean bright courtyard, in one corner of which a feathery clump of nacrour cherry-blossom sways over the top of the high wall, against an azure sky. Inside the house which forms one side of the enclosure,

are two small but very comfortable rooms, quite the pleasantest I have so far encountered. The carpets are as usual good; for these Persian rugs—although inferior to the poorest of the old—are much better than the ordinary carpets of Europe. I am scarcely settled when there is a tramping of numerous feet in the court, as the Governor arrives, accompanied by a body-guard of retainers and servants. He is a fine-looking man of middle age, with clear-cut features and intelligent eyes, whose active and martial bearing impresses me at once. He speaks no French (the foreign language most used in Persia) so we are obliged to struggle with an interpreter. After a long wait for the indispensable tea, we start to visit the town. A splendid dark iron-grey stallion is waiting for me, with an absolutely new Cossack saddle of black leather. These saddles are fitted with a small leather cushion, very thick and hard, and are doubtless excellent for those accustomed to use them. This being my first experience, I find it impossible to keep my seat, sliding about in a ludicrous way, and almost breaking my spine against a hard spur which projects at the back of the saddle. The Governor is mounted on a beautiful tan-coloured mule, with yellow velvet saddle and saddle-cloths; its silky coat and ability to gallop as fast as a horse, betoken fine breeding.

We first ride to the citadel, an agglomeration of ruinous mud-walls, enclosing—on a lower level—what once were dwellings, in the centre of which a

house for the Governor has recently been built. There are picturesque views where the walls have fallen, revealing the mound on which the citadel stands, sloping down to a moat still filled with water. In one direction, looking through a crumbling frame of clay-walls, a slender golden brown minaret rises skyward, far away across the flat roofs and low mud-walls of the town, now beautified by a profusion of delicate fruit blossoms—white or faint pink—growing everywhere. On the other side, the tomb of an Imām Zāda rises close at hand, a building of pale yellow brick surmounted by a very pointed dome; while to northward the distant shrine of another saint is easily to be distinguished across the plain. Wherever I look there are innumerable flat domes of mud breaking through roof terraces—like air bubbles on the surface of a muddy pond; for in countries where wood is too rare to use in ordinary building, the rudest hovel has to be vaulted. Far away the deep blue mountains are draped with passing clouds, while the sun—sinking fast toward their crests—casts a mellow glow, falling peacefully on all things like a caress.

Somewhere on the uninhabited plain, across which I am gazing in this quiet golden light, lay two thousand years ago the great city with the boastful name, Hecatompylos; where the Macedonian celebrated decisive victory over the quondam lord of all Persia, that Darius whose long flight across his realm found an end in death by

treachery not far from here. Memory of this and a love for sonorous syllables, must have prompted Milton, when he wrote:—

“Ecbatana her structure vast there shows,
And Hecatompylos her hundred gates.”

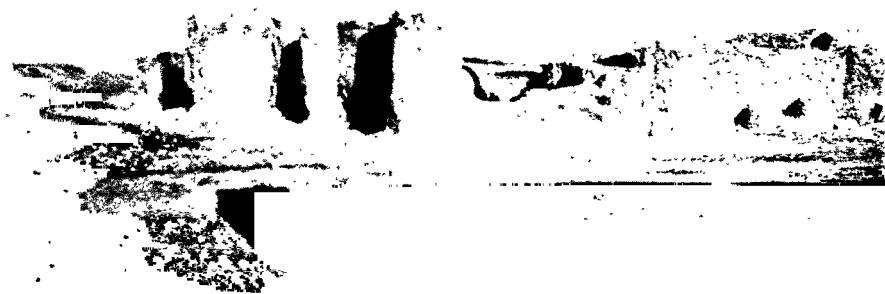
The rubble amid which I am standing, was also once the centre of an important town, harried and razed by one ferocious conqueror after another; for Dāmghān's blood-befouled name occurs frequently in the sinister chronicles of barbarity. A hundred years after Alexander had become no more than a sounding name, the plain of Dāmghān re-echoed with the tramping of troops lead by Antiochus the Great; ten centuries later, another army swept past these walls to its defeat; then in rapid succession, atrocity upon atrocity laid the city waste. The hordes of that great Mongol, the world-compelling Chingiz Khān, for eight years filled the land with terror; and outside these very walls the “Scourge of God”—Tīmūr Lang—built those monstrous towers of human heads already mentioned. Here Zakī Khān, in the eighteenth century, made a garden of his captives lashed to tree-boughs and buried alive in the ground, with green leaves fluttering over their agony. Here the blind grandson of that Nādir Shāh who laid imperial Delhi in ruin, died from the effects of a crown filled with boiling oil, forced on his head by the cruel eunuch Āghā



The Citadel of Bustām

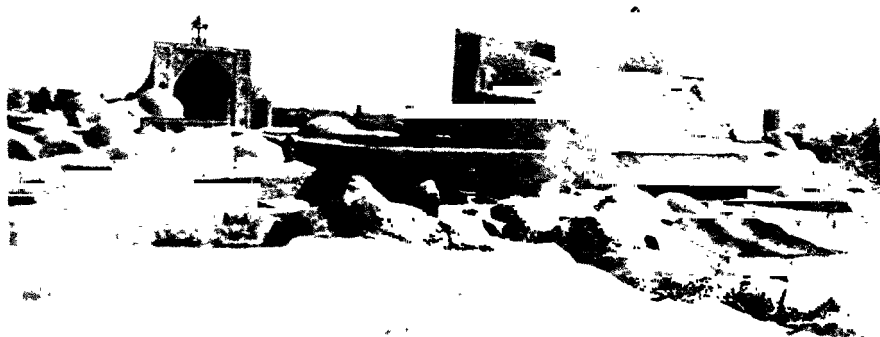


Late Afternoon, from the Fortress, Dāmghān



The Ribāt of Anūshirwān

(A fortified resting-place built by Anūshirwān, better known as Chosroe the Just)



The Shāh's Mosque, Samnān

Muḥammad Khān, founder of the still reigning Persian dynasty. Here was born that superb Shāh, Fath 'Ālī, the report of whose splendour spread through Europe. Nothing in the whole world brings the futility of all existence more keenly home than these abandoned plains, where life has ebbed from cities once filled with the hum of human occupations and the clamour of great monarchs, leaving nothing more than a few mounds that only serve to furnish learned archæologists with material for volumes of ponderous dispute. . . .

We next ride out of the town to the gates, where the Governor's carriage overtakes us—a really smart landau drawn by an excellent pair of horses. In this we gallop—at times on a dead run—across the plain to a curious ruin, which the Governor tells me formed part of an old city, the site of whose gates is marked by two mounds hard at hand. On the way back, there is a fine view of the town: a low wall of dried earth (preceded by the saint's mausoleum) over which roofs and domes show amid a profusion of early blossoms, giving charm to what otherwise would be a commonplace sight. Aided by the spell which a declining sun lays upon all it touches, the nearby mountains lend majesty to Dāmghān—the first attractive town I have seen in Persia. On entering the city, we dash through the narrow bazar—preceded by mounted *suwārs*—at such a break-neck speed as makes me fear lest we kill one of the scattering

vendors, or be ourselves dashed to pieces against the walls. Fading light, which glazes the clay houses and waving branches, makes me loth to go indoors; but politeness requires it, since the Governor leads the way to my rooms with martial stride.

After nearly two hours of conversation, really interesting despite the difficulty of carrying it on, dinner is brought in with a certain confusion, since the Governor has ordered it served in European style on a table and in courses. Āghājān, although a little too officious, really saves the day by showing the servants how this should be done. The meal is excellent, but the Governor only makes a pretence of touching a dish now and then out of politeness, as he intends dining at home at some Persian mid-nocturnal hour. Nowhere have I seen a person turn his household upside-down and put himself out to such a degree, in order to please a guest. It is quintessential hospitality.

In the course of conversation I learn that the Governor was born in the Caucasus, I believe of Persian ancestors; and came to Persia during the Revolution, when he was made a prisoner by the Amīr X., whose service he then entered. He is the first active virile personality I have met in Persia, and impresses me by his force and intelligence. He discusses European politics, and—to my great surprise—makes one or two well-informed enquiries about the relations between the United States and Mexico. He inevitably men-

tions Persia's grief at Russian invasion; stating that Persians will never forgive the bombardment of the shrine at Mashhad, and the hanging of the *mullās* at Tabriz—a city the Russians have made “unclean.” He tells me that the Russians have illegally seized fertile lands belonging to Persians around Astarābād; and insists that when the Persians are able to drive the Russians out, God will forgive anything they may do to their oppressors. To my surprise again, he is interested in antiquities, giving me curious details about excavations around Dāmghān.

March 11th

Last night the Governor courteously declared his intention of escorting me in person as far as a property belonging to the Amīr, where he wishes to offer me luncheon. He was to have come at seven o'clock, but it is eight when a clattering of attendants announces his arrival. While taking tea, he holds a levee of retainers. When waiting, the servants stand close to the wall with head and shoulders slightly bowed, never failing to hold one hand with the other—perhaps a survival of the days when Persian etiquette required that hands and feet should, as a sign of respect, always be covered by the hem of the robe. Whenever the Governor has to write, he—like all Persians—holds the sheet of paper in his left hand, without resting it on something as we should have to do.

Whether this is the cause or an effect of their delicate writing, I do not know; but Persian script is far more lightly traced and minute than that of the Arabs. Everyone, the Governor included, goes armed in these parts; he carries, slung across one shoulder, a large Mauser pistol in a wonderful case handsomely ornamented with gold, which is arranged to fasten to the revolver and act as a stock, thus forming a small rifle supposedly able to carry a thousand metres. The Governor's *suwārs* are all armed in the same way, and are smarter than any I have yet seen; I am told that he arms, feeds, and pays, five hundred out of his own pocket.

The Governor proceeds on foot to his carriage, which is waiting outside the gate, whilst I go to the bazar to take my omnibus. When I arrive, there are over a hundred people waiting to see me start, lined up along the street and in tiers on the sloping bank; they are quiet and respectful, making no audible comment, but I find their presence rather disconcerting. Saïd tells me that when he climbed onto the roof of the carriage to attach the luggage—which Āghājān cannot be trusted to do—their astonishment at seeing a European thus engaged, was intense. Outside the city, the Governor is waiting for me in his carriage—this time a victoria. Taking my place beside him, we start, surrounded by *suwārs*. The driver of my diligence insists on keeping ahead of us despite my frantic signs to Āghājān; Saïd, being in the

forward compartment, cannot see what is happening. Finally the Governor orders his coachman to pass it; but the moment we come abreast, the driver whips up his horses and off they gallop, faster and faster the more we try to get ahead. The driver is perched on top, holding his four horses with outstretched arms, while the old waggon rolls from side to side like a ship in a heavy sea. Āghājān now begins to realise what has occurred, but instead of leaning out to shout to the driver, jumps out of the carriage backward and falls flat, skinning his hands and knees. Said finally succeeds in stopping the driver, who must have been possessed by a devil, since Persians are usually abject in their respect for those in authority. Fortunately the Governor is only amused, laughing heartily at what was certainly a most ludicrous scene.

It is a radiant morning, and the golden mountains tipped with snow, which stand guard over Dāmghān, glow as though newly burnished. The clear keen air produces a thrill which makes all things charming. About ten we reach our objective point, a small village which the Amīr's property adjoins. This is a very large rectangle, fortified with high walls of mud and towers at each corner; in the centre of the front wall is a small two-storeyed house, whitewashed and with a *loggia* over the gateway giving admission to the enclosure. This villa is to be used as a residence for the Amīr whenever he chooses to come; while a

hamlet of mud houses is in process of building inside the walls—apparently model dwellings for workmen of these parts. In front of the walls beggarly labourers are digging what will eventually be an orchard. When we pass, there are choruses of “Ya! ‘Alī!” which I take to be in the Governor’s honour; but continual repetition proves that they are merely encouraging each other by invoking the martyr khalif whom all Shi’ites revere.

From the roof-terraces there is a view across the plain, dotted as far as the first mountain spurs with fortified villages, while far away lie the ruins of a town destroyed by Afghans. An officer of the Amīr’s household—just arrived by post—and the chief of the *suwārs* join us at the luncheon cloth spread on the floor. There are knives and forks for me, but the others—including the Europeanised Governor—eat with their fingers, gulping food with a rapidity I have not seen equalled; this produces loud belching, which there is no attempt to conceal. About midday I take leave of my most hospitable host, and start with a large escort. After the next relay, where they leave me, I discover a *suwār* comfortably ensconced in the rear of the carriage with Āghājān; it appears he was ordered to accompany me, but having a lame horse, decided to do so in this way. As he is only a nuisance, it is rather annoying to have his added weight in the already heavily laden carriage. The road now begins to mount steadily toward the

pass of Ahūwān, between low hills and across one of those deadly plains, the mere record of which fatigues. About five-thirty we reach the summit of the defile which takes its name (Gazelles) from a legend connected with the kindliness of the Imām Riḍā. In a depression just below the highest point are a few hovels, a brick caravanserai attributed to Shāh 'Abbās, and the ruins of the Ribāṭ of Anūshīrwān. This was a fortified resting-place, built in the sixth century of our era by the great Sasanian monarch, Anūshīrwān—better known as Khusraw (Chosroes)—who forced the Roman Empire, in the person of Justinian, to pay tribute, expelled the Abyssinians from Arabia, and raised to its apogee the power of Persia. The fact that his endeavours to render justice and improve the condition of the poor, should have gained for him the appellation of the Just, despite his having caused all his brothers and uncles—not to mention a hundred thousand heretics—to be put to death, affords an interesting glimpse of epochs, whose conditions we can to-day scarce conceive. Of his celebrated fortress nothing remains but a rectangular mass of yellow walls and towers, built of earth and stone, crumbling to ruin and devoid of any but archæological interest. Nevertheless, standing on this high barren pass watching the chill rays of a late afternoon sun slant toward their decay; it is curious to reflect on all that it must have seen pass during thirteen hundred years; at

least it serves as a reminder that in Sa'di's words:—

“Many are they, once famed, beneath the ground,
That left no record of their little worth,
And the old corse surrendered, earth to earth,
Was so consumed that not a bone is found.
The glories of King Nusherwan remain,
And time remembers his munificence.”

When we start again the sun is still bright although westering fast; but in the east, the magnified disk of a full moon, cold and white, has already begun ascending the pathways of the sky. As we drive along the road—now rising, now falling—the moon grows golden, moving through the stainless blue above lion-coloured hills strangely formed like crouching beasts. Then the sun disappears, but its rays still dominate the moon, leaving the Occident aglow with saffron that fades upward into lavender. From verge to zenith the lucent sky has that curious effect—occurring only at sunset—when it appears not so much a vault of solid colour as a luminous medium, through whose tremulous depth sight seems to plunge afar. Then the last reflections slowly pale before the moon's victorious advance, and the stars troop round the now refulgent orb. Very soon the scenery is half hidden, half revealed by that dim radiance which lies on all things, concealing the ugly and gracing with mystery the commonest of objects.

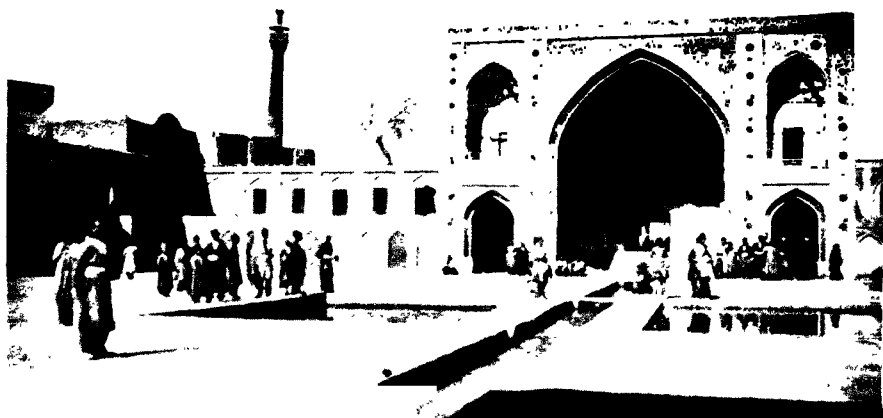
When we reach the place where the Governor of Dāmghān advised me to spend the night, there is nothing but a particularly filthy tea-house with a single room full of natives. There is nothing to do but try to reach Samnān to-night; fortunately it is almost as light as day, and not too cold. Rattling through the starry night down the road which descends two thousand five hundred feet from Ahūwān to Samnān, is not unpleasant. After more than two hours, the vague outlines of the city grow visible in the moon-dusk; gradually they become more distinct, until we pass between high plaster posts set to mark the way, and reach an open square outside the walls, about half-past ten. As the Amīr X. is not expecting me until to-morrow, there is no one to meet me, nor any state entry preceded by a mace as at Shāhrūd—which is rather a relief.

Āghājān goes off to announce my arrival, and soon returns with the Amīr's head-servant carrying a lantern, who shows us the way to where I am to lodge. Driving through the city gates and down a broad avenue between high walls hiding everything, we stop at the entrance to what I am told is the Governor's palace. Entering by a dark passage, I find myself in a large courtyard bathed in moonlight, where a few bare trees and blossomy shrubs grow in neglected beds around a central pool. A large portico with four white columns at the head of a flight of steps, forms the central motive on one side of the court. Behind

this colonnade is a single room, into which I am ushered. Nothing could be more characteristic of Persia; by the dim light of two candles, I see an enormous room—as big as the entrance hall of some old abbey—with a wooden ceiling twenty feet or more high. A fine carpet covers the floor, and there are three or four gaudy chairs, gilded and covered with red velvet; but the walls are whitewashed, and the openings in the rough wooden window-doors have neither glass nor anything else to keep out air. At either end of this imposing apartment is a tiny room with unswept floors, walls scrawled with pencils, and doors also without glass. In one of these my bed is set up and a fire lighted. Although I do not wish to eat, the servants insist on serving a meal; after an interminable wait, a throng of dishes arrives from the Amīr's own house, nearly a mile away, and is duly set out on the floor. When hot they might be palatable; in their present gelid condition they are quite nasty, and sitting on the floor alone in this vast dim room, with gusts of wind sailing across, endeavouring to force down some of the strange viands, under the eyes of Persian servants watching every move,—is a painful experience.

March 12th

My enforced banquet of chilled food was too much for me; I was violently ill all night, and this morning can hardly raise my head long enough to

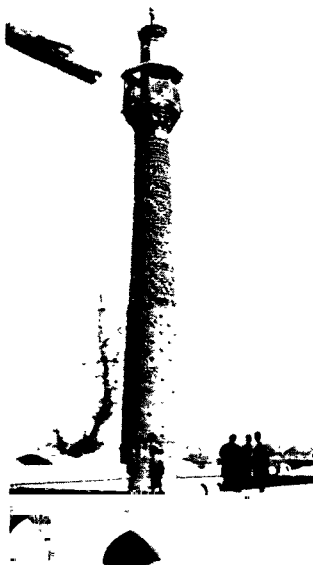


Court of the Shāh's Mosque, Samnān
 (It is most unusual to be allowed to enter a mosque in Persia)



Tomb of an Imām Zāda, Samnān

Minaret of the Assembly Mosque, Samnān
A fine specimen of the terminal cages, most
of which have been destroyed



The Governor's Palace, Samnān

dress for the Amīr's visit. He arrives about ten o'clock—a tall heavily-built man, still young but very stout, with an active bearing despite a paunch not unworthy of Falstaff. To my relief he speaks French easily and quite well. He tells me about his exile in Europe, and how he intended entering the French army, when the late Shāh telegraphed to the Persian Ambassador that if the Amīr entered the French service, he would bombard the Amīr's home, kill all his family, and dismiss the Ambassador. The Amīr goes on to say that he did not care about his family's danger, but abandoned his project out of consideration for the Ambassador, whose debts—due to the non-payment of his salary—would have meant ruin, had he lost his post. He next gives me details of his sojourn in Constantinople, directing operations against Muḥammad 'Alī Shāh, and of his return to Persia on the Shāh's deposition; dwelling on the bravery he displayed against rebels, when governing the town of Z. He also mentions that he has heard that Mr. Shuster has spoken ill of him in his book; but says, this is due to false reports circulated by his enemies, of which he was never able to disabuse Mr. Shuster's mind. He finally refers to the way in which the present government fails to pay the troops under his orders (who are for that reason unmanageable), while it continues expecting him to maintain security. In all he says the Amīr "blows his own trumpet" without shame or hesitation. This interview throws a

vivid light on Persian character, when I remember the evidence of his cowardice recorded in the British *Blue-Book*, and recall Mr. Shuster's statement that "the Amīr was a man whose general reputation would warrant a long sentence in any workhouse." My opinion of the Amīr's character does not, however, diminish my gratitude for his hospitality and the unfailing courtesy with which I have everywhere been received, thanks to his orders. When he is ready to leave, I can only make my excuses, stating that I am too ill to go out, and crawl back to bed for the rest of the day.

March 13th

This morning the Amīr sends his head-servant to show me the city. I find that the avenue skirting the Governor's palace, is guarded at each end by a gateway decorated with mosaic and curious pinnacles bulging out near the top like the lotus capitals of Egypt. One of the gates has a gorgeous modern mosaic of Rustam slaying the White Devil, a formidable giant whose body is tattooed with elaborate patterns; while both of them are enlivened by mosaics of soldiers with foolishly fierce expressions. Passing through the bazars and an open square—where a mountebank is preparing to swallow glass,—we reach the Mosque of Fath 'Alī Shāh. To my surprise I am taken into the court, contrary to the custom which

forbids all foreigners access to mosques; but it appears that the *mullās* of Samnān are singularly tolerant, and have even invited a Christian missionary to address the faithful in the mosque. Little attention is paid me, and no visible objection made to my presence or to my taking photographs. The court is large and clean, surrounded by arcades with a lofty pavilion in the centre of each side, two being much more important than the others. The architecture—of pale buff brick with coloured designs—is good, the elaborate vaulting of the great niches ingenious, and the general effect imposing. From the roof there is a lovely view, across mud-walls overhung with newly blossomed fruit-trees to ruddy mountains capped with snow. Beyond the house-roofs hard at hand—domed like beavers' huts—a great *chinār* tree, still leafless, rears its network of boughs and twigs beside an *Imām Zāda's* shrine; but the most conspicuous object is the minaret of the Assembly or Friday Mosque. It is of brown brick, completely covered with patterns in high relief; and is very slender, tapering from the base to the original cage of fine wooden tracery, which is still preserved.

On returning, I learn that I am lodged in the palace of the old gentleman who governs the town under the Amīr, himself the governor of an entire province. It appears that Persian justice is done here; for Saīd tells me that during my absence the bastinado was given to a poor shrieking wretch,

just as in the days of Haji Baba, except that they struck his feet with whips instead of rods. He was beaten for several minutes, and could hardly walk when released. I suppose I shall see a man *gached* before I leave this delectable country, where they still make human pillars of offenders, built up with fresh plaster, which crushes them to death in setting! While trying to eat a luncheon of chilled food, the very sight of which makes me ill, a man appears on the roof across the court and begins to chant his prayers in piercing tones. Were I Allah, my omniscience would grow weary of listening to the world resound with these strident and mechanical ejaculations of my name; and I should, in my solitude, almost hate these continual reminders that there is "no God but Allah."

March 14th

It is seven o'clock, when I leave Samnān in a carriage which the Amīr has kindly sent to take me the first stage, with an officer and eight men escorting it. We start off on the dead run—which style demands in Persia—and all but upset in the ditch outside the gate. When I return to civilisation, driving steadily on real roads in real carriages, without a ragged escort galloping about, will—I fear—seem monotonous. At the first relay, I climb into my rattling diligence and start across a desolate plain, occasionally dotted with

small towers of mud in which the produce of the fields is stored against theft. About ten we reach Lasgird, where there are no horses; so we are obliged to wait until those we brought, have been fed and rested.

The remains of this old city—which in some form dates back fifteen hundred years—are extremely curious. The Turkomen made life a hazard in these parts; wherefore, to protect themselves, the inhabitants of Lasgird, at a date I do not pretend to determine, built a fortress-town on an isolated plateau, in miniature not unlike those on which Italian cities—such as Siena—stand. This plateau was without doubt artificially made, since its level is not very much higher than that of the plain, from which it is separated by a moat as wide and deep as a small valley. The clay cliffs must have been a sufficient protection in themselves, without fortified walls above; for, as recently as six years ago, picturesque dwellings of dried clay, like the bluff they overhung with their wooden balconies, crowned the unbroken edge of this plateau-city. To-day but little is left of them, for the natives—after the manner of all Persians—destroy whatever time has spared. This morning there is a continuous rattling and thumping as clouds of dust veil the cliff, where villagers are throwing the old houses into the moat, to use their earth to enrich the fields. Climbing the narrow path guarded by a fortified gate, which alone gives ingress to Lasgird, I find myself in

what looks like the confused ruins of a gigantic bee-hive. . . .

Nearly all the men idling about the stable to watch me, are dressed in blue; which—in shades from pale cobalt to indigo—seems to be the only colour generally used in this country, except brown for cloaks and black for the frock-coats of the Europeanised. When we finally start, the country is unspeakably dreary; endless plain with low hills on the one hand and, on the other, hills so creased, they look as though created by pressing them down until forced into folds. They have long spur-like claws, and vary in colour from a vague pink to stretches of ugly purple-red—the shade of dried blood, where there are stripes of tan and white spots with mauve edges. The whole range is metallic and ghastly, like the calcined remains of a cataclysm. Mile after mile of plain strewn with rock, begins to work on my nerves. The only distraction is afforded by the sight of a few distant citadels, like that at Lasgird and like it in ruin. About five o'clock we reach a place called, I believe, 'Aliābād; to my annoyance no horses are to be had, and I do not dare start after waiting for the horses to rest, as the road is reported bad and there will be no moon until late. The caravanserai is more than I can put up with, notwithstanding my recent training; so I persuade the *gendarmes*—who are the first of those trained by Swedish officers we have met—to give me a room in their post. No food of any sort can be



The Ruins of Lasgird, the Fortress City



My Third Vehicle, Masshad to Tihân



A Slight Interruption on a Khurāsān Road
The Persian Post in a Bad Position



Aghājān Fording a Stream

bought, so I have to manage with what is left from the luncheon carried with me. The *gendarmes* keep coming into the room to watch me, on the pretext of fetching some of their belongings, until I can bear it no longer, and have to ask them—through Āghājān—to leave me alone. Really I am beginning to long to escape from Persia; for so far, there has been nothing interesting enough to repay me for the discomforts and annoyances—of which being unable even to wash in privacy, is not the least.

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March 15th

When after breakfasting I step out about six o'clock, it is still a moon-lit night without sign of dawn. The "artist," Āghājān, displays his powers at their best this morning; while dressing, he assured me the horses were ready, but I now find him sitting lazily at the door of the tea-house, with not a single horse in sight. This is rather too much; so I prod him with my stick until he gets up, then—without really hurting him—give him a couple of cuts across the legs, in the hope of frightening him sufficiently to make him have the horses brought out. After a long wait, they begin to appear through the dusk between moonlight and on-coming day. The drivers harness them with unusual slowness, which is maddening, since I wish to make a desperate attempt to reach Ṭihrān this evening. Last night the post-master

promised me six horses to get me across a bad ford, if I waited till morning; there is not a sign of them, however. It is now long after six o'clock, and a dull red spot crawling toward us across the plain, must be the lantern of a waggon; if it arrive before I have started, there is sure to be a dispute about horses. Scolding and pleading cannot arouse in Āghājān enough courage to make the drivers bring out the extra horses. A carriage drives up while we are waiting, and realises my worst fears by proving to be the post, which has right of way. The driver now flatly refuses to give me extra horses, saying they are required by the post. In desperation I shake him soundly, as that has heretofore proved efficacious; this time the result is unexpected, for the man begins to pick up stones and throw them at me. Āghājān of course stands by whimpering, without raising a finger; but Saïd puts an end to the bombardment, by jumping on the man from the roof of our carriage, where he was fastening luggage. Then the most terrific row I have yet seen, ensues over the question as to whether I am to have any horses or not. The chief of the relay, drivers, post-driver, post-passengers, Āghājān, and half the village, scream and gesticulate, while I stand by, silent but very combative, as I have a right to at least four horses. I call the chief of the *gendarmes* over, but he is of no service; finally I have to agree to start with four horses when the post is ready, which is to lend me its horses to ford the

river. Having got up before five o'clock, I manage to leave after seven—utterly fatigued and ruffled by the delay and dispute, entirely due to the wretched “artist’s” customary failure to have the carriage ready.

It is now full day and radiantly bright. About eight we come to a broad stream, now a torrent more than a foot deep raging between high banks. After palavering and reconnoitring without end, the post—which first had to be hauled, with the aid of my horses, out of the mud where it had stuck—manages to cross safely. Then two horses are ridden back and harnessed to my diligence beside the other four; while I stand on the bank in suspense, it crosses slowly, reeling from side to side with its loaded roof, and threatening to capsize every second. When it has reached the bank without accident, horses are once more brought back for Saïd and me to ride across, with our feet drawn up to keep them out of the splashing water. This performance occupies almost an hour, but the driver cannot be persuaded to harness the horses, until I prod him thoroughly with my stick.

At last we reach Qishlāq, rather a large village with a detachment of neatly uniformed *gendarmes*, belonging to the *gendarmerie* created by Mr. Shuster and since organised—with questionable success—by Swedish officers. Their presence since yesterday shows our proximity to Ṭihrān. Fortunately there are eight horses so there is no

dispute as to whether the post or I shall take them. While waiting here, the chief of *gendarmes*—a neat soldierly young Persian—enquires if I am armed, and then insists that I must give up my pistol, leaving it with him to send on when I have secured the proper permit at Tīhrān. This I flatly refuse to do, as I should never see it again, and moreover conditions are such that I am not willing to travel unarmed even from here to the capital; fortunately he does not insist.

While leaning against the carriage in the middle of a very narrow street, filled with people standing along the walls and in shop doors,—I suddenly hear a shot hard at hand. Looking up, I see one of the *gendarmes* standing with a smoking rifle in a doorway a few feet off. The horses are so excited, my first thought is that one of them has been hit, my second that the man has run amok and shot an enemy. Before I can tell what has happened, the *gendarme* drops his gun, rushes up to me, and begins to moan, trembling and wringing his hands. Thinking he has gone mad and may attack me, I start to seize him—when I hear groans on the other side of the carriage, run round, and discover the poor bare-legged fellow who was harnessing the horses, stretched on the ground bleeding profusely from a wound in the leg. Luckily the bullet went clean through the fleshy part of the calf. It appears that the *gendarme*, not knowing how to handle his rifle properly, discharged it by mistake. He is standing here in

ignoble terror, gibbering like an idiot. The officer finally makes his appearance, and has him led away by two of his comrades. As the wounded man is not seriously injured, and the officer has summoned a doctor, there is nothing to do but leave him to the mercy of Persian surgery.

From Qishlāq the road leads across the desert to the hills rising from the plain precipitously—like the foremost wave of some molten flood, which in prehistoric times swept across the country, until here suddenly solidified. At one or two points a jagged peak emerges from this immense dyke, which descending water has ravaged, until the entire surface is fluted like a column and streaked horizontally by varying strata. In colour these hills are light ochre, in places faintly tinged with purple, as though some pomegranate coloured liquid had flowed down them, leaving stains through which the yellow sometimes shows. The higher hills on the left are rosier or even rusty, barred with ugly lines of deep purplish red, while in one place a mass of cindery black resembles a seared wound.

Turning sharply to the right, we enter the Sardara Pass. At first it is so narrow, there is only just enough room for the road beside a little stream of clear water running swiftly over pebbles. Then it widens out to a small plain, then contracts once more. The low ridges on either side are fluted and glazed like all the others, but have curious rolls of earth running down to the stream,

where they are cut off abruptly. These hills seem encrusted with metallic tints of orange, green, and mauve, which make the whole defile look like mineral ore. There are saline deposits everywhere—plaques of leprous white on the higher slopes, on the lower spurs a feathery powder. These strange formations with their acrid colours—varying from yellow to crude purples, interrupted by jagged peaks of red—and their fantastic flutes, now vertical, now curved, grasping the valley floor as though with fingers, compose an artificial panorama, suggesting the work of acids on an unknown scale.

The best authorities seem agreed that this is the "*Caspiæ Portæ*," through which Darius fled from the Greeks. It is therefore probable that these lurid hills saw hyacinthine-headed Alexander, with his army, pass in pursuit. The great Macedonian may have been in reality ill-favoured; but I can never think of him except as the incarnation of that Hermes carved by Praxiteles, whose deathless beauty illumines the little museum built in the ruins of Olympia, among the pines that on golden summer-days waft into the presence of the god an aromatic fragrance like the scent of sunshine. Thus must the young conqueror have looked, when he traversed this defile. On the comely head and close-curved ringlets, a great helmet certainly rested, its vermilion crest standing out against the clear colours of the pass as violently as blood on white skin. His gilded armour—however be-

dimmed by dust—must have coruscated, flinging back the sun-rays. He could never have been on foot, so his charger surely arched a close-cropped mane, and tossed a small fine head—as the horses do in the Panathenaic festival on the marbles of the Parthenon—swaying, with every step, the young conqueror's bare knees and well-rounded legs encased in greaves. Perhaps then as now, a little wind rustled the sedge on the river's brink, catching his mantle and whirling it out like a wave of flame. Eagerness and even anxiety—later exultation, when, on reaching the plain, he learned the capture of Codomannus—must have wrought his face; although, without doubt, a certain poise dignified his emotion. The soldiers, hastening after and around him, could have been but little more romantic than those of the present; nevertheless, even they must have had a touch of that Grecian goodliness since lost. To-day not so much as a pinch of dust remains of that Trampler of Kings who wept for other worlds to conquer; yet here in this remote pass, to me he seems more real than the driver on the box. What curiously complicated creatures we are! I note these ideas, because they occur to me—at least to one half of my brain. But another half calls them mere rhetoric, born of a desire for suitably romantic sensation; a stern and mocking half which maintains this is nothing but a moderately picturesque part of a barren country Alexander probably never saw; and that even if he did see it,

driving through it does not make him one half so real as he is in the works of historians and poets.

If Alexander crossed this pass, I am sure he never met with difficulties greater than those which impede us to-day. In several places the road makes a perilous plunge to the river-bed, then rises precipitously on the other side; the only way for the driver to negotiate these crossings, is to send the horses down on the run, strike the stream with a splash, then gallop up the other side,—the carriage careening wildly every minute, in imminent danger of upsetting. Needless to say, we all prefer walking at these moments. In one place where the bridge is down, we stick fast in the gully beside it; here we might have remained all day, had the post not chanced to overtake us and lend extra horses. This it does, not out of kindness so much as necessity, since we bar the road. One of the passengers—a pleasant-looking youth in a clean coat of sky-blue—takes our horses by the head, and leads them up the winding road at a gallop, holding in one hand a blue glass lamp, with which he will entrust no one. He is a comical sight, brandishing his lamp; but I am sincerely grateful to him, inasmuch as he is the first Persian who has voluntarily aided us when in trouble.

About two o'clock we reach Aiwān-i-Kayf; a large mud village divided by what must sometimes be a river, but is now only a very wide expanse of stones and pebbles, through which muddy rills run swiftly. The river-bed is dotted with women

washing linen, many of them dressed in citron-coloured veils, which make picturesque spots against the buff background. Beyond Aiwān-i-Kayf the wind whirls by, driving clouds of dust across the detestable plain over which rain is threatening. There is nothing to relieve the monotony which in Persia seems eternal, until we reach Sharifābād late in the afternoon. In the dreary light, pines, poplars, and flowering fruit-trees,—which crown the walls like a giant garland—seem doubly graceful. From here, the road is constantly cut by fairly deep streams of water, rushing down from the high mountains now hard at hand; the fords are difficult to cross and require much reconnoitring before we venture. Suddenly the sinking sun appears on the horizon, between the hills and the black edge of a rain cloud, turning that portion of the sky a gloomy green-gold, while overhead the air is filled with luminous trails of vapour. Then the sun sets and darkness falls fast, until complete when we reach a caravanserai; here I decide we must pass the night, as, if I try to reach Ṭihrān, we might easily upset while crossing a stream in the darkness.

March 16th

This morning it is very cold when we leave about seven o'clock, with supposedly only four *farsakhs* between us and Ṭihrān; but, as usual, they grow longer the farther we go. The sun

makes feeble efforts to pierce snow-clouds, illuminating the landscape with faint opal light, while an icy wind blows straight from the snow-mountains. The roadside is strewn with more than the customary number of camel skeletons and bloody carcasses of decaying donkeys. The constant sight of unheeded death and the odour of neglected carrion, add a special horror to travel in countries such as this, where small incidents continually emphasise that murderous and indifferent aspect of life, which in civilisation is somewhat veiled.

The road slowly rises among barren hills, with the golden dome of Shāh Abdu'l 'Aẓīm looking like a large yellow tulip far away in the distance down a valley; then it turns sharply to the right, winding up and around the shoulder of a mountain, until far below—through the opening between descending hills—a great table-land, tinged with varying greens, lies before us. On every side hills and mountains form an amphitheatre, where Ṭīhrān is just visible across the plain, nestling at the foot of the hills. Opposite us, the mountains begin to rise in lofty snow-peaks, until to the north they culminate in the imperial cone of Damāwand; then, curving around, sink once more to the level of the barren hill on which we have halted. It is a noble site for a city—probably unworthy of its beautiful surroundings. The road now pitches down past the Pārsīs' round white "tower of silence," with distant views of Ray;

then reaches the level, where the blue domes and clustered minarets of the capital grow each moment more distinct. Past a curious series of high mud walls, used to keep shallow ditches of water in shade so ice will form, and between hovels of dried clay; we jolt along to the tiled and once gaudy gate of Ṭihrān. After paying an entrance tax on the carriage, we drive through shabby streets where a little horse-tram rolls along, around the large and uninteresting Maidān-i-Ṭūp, and up a broad avenue to the little Hôtel de Paris, kept by the former Shāh's French chauffeur—the man who was wounded by the bomb thrown at Muḥammad 'Alī. Its modest but comfortable accommodations, and its good coffee and milk with real bread and butter, seem to me the height of luxury; for the disappointing journey of six hundred miles across the wastes of Khurāsān and Irāq, has sorely tried my endurance by its lack of those interests which make negligible the hardships of travel.

IV

ṬIHRĀN TO ISFAHĀN

IV

ṬIHRĀN TO ISFAHĀN

March 17th to 25th

A MORE uninteresting place than the capital of Persia would be difficult to discover. The modern city of Ṭihrān comprises a commonplace native town, a large square without distinction, a few shabby streets of European shops, and a quarter without charm almost entirely occupied by foreign legations. Customs and costumes are of no interest, since they are neither truly Persian nor wholly European. The city's vague pretension to be a Europeanised capital, makes it even less attractive than such places as Mashhad. Residence here must surely be a trial to all Europeans—except members of the British and Russian Legations, whose endless game of political chess probably makes life exciting. To outsiders this contest is not pleasant to watch; for a visit to Ṭihrān confirms the impression that, however degenerate Persians may be, they have never—since the Revolution—been given a decent opportunity to attempt reforms, without the

interested dictation of the Powers. Germany's incredible and all-reaching influence has probably been at work in subterranean channels; Russia has openly hectoring and seized everything of value; while Great Britain has been compelled by political necessities of irresistible force to violate her best traditions, and—in the words of an Englishman—"play the ignoble rôle of lending respectability to the proceedings."

It is difficult to avoid politics here, since they are in the very air one breathes. Politics, represented by the Legations, also contribute the one picturesque sight in Tīhrān—the carriages of the ministers and officers, driving about preceded by two horsemen and followed by a guard, carrying lances with fluttering pennons. The other thing which lends a little grace to this dreary city, is the snow-mountains visible at every street end. They peer serenely down with their pearly masses, or, in the case of Damāwand, a sky-supporting cone; and almost succeed in dignifying the tragi-comedy of the capital. They are particularly beautiful when seen from the old ramparts at sun-down; the whole range then stands out sharply, a lightless expanse of cold blue-green, while the tip of Damāwand suddenly flushes pink, glowing as though illumined from within.

The American Missionaries direct a large and prosperous school in Tīhrān. The pupils come from all ranks, and one of the main endeavours of their teachers, is to supplant the oriental attitude



A Street in Tihran
The snow mountains are just within this illustration at the
end of the street



The Sardara Pass
This is thought to be the " Caspiae Portae " through which Alexander pursued Darius



Travelling in a Fourgon without Springs. Waiting for a Horse to be Shod at a Relay on the Road to Qum



The River and the Shrine of Fâtima, Qum

of servility or disdain by a sense of healthy self-respect in those from the lower classes, and of considerate equality on the part of the better born. Fundamental ideas of honesty—which centuries of evil-training have obscured in Persian minds—are inculcated, and a sound general education given; the ground being in this way prepared for the acceptance of religious ideas. What the results may be from the religious standpoint, I do not know; but it is certain that this training will uplift every young Persian so fortunate as to enjoy its benefits. Even those who disbelieve in Foreign Missions on principle, must feel admiration for the educational work done by this Mission School.

The most admirable thing in Tīhrān is, however, in my judgment, the British Legation. With that sense of what is fitting which always characterises it, the British Government owns and keeps in perfect order a large and beautiful park with a suitable dwelling for the Minister, and smaller houses for the Secretaries and Attachés, and even for the English doctor appointed by Government. There is no unnecessary show; but grounds, carriages, servants, guards, and everything else, are maintained in a dignified manner, which worthily upholds the prestige of a great empire. The Legation staff is, without exception, composed of cultivated and finished diplomats. Judging by the way I—without any letters of introduction—have been received by every member of the Lega-

tion, their courtesy and hospitality know no limit. At least, they are such as those who have enjoyed them, will not easily forget. To British courtesy I am also indebted for the possibility of continuing my journey. In the present condition of Persia, travel from Tīhrān to the Persian Gulf is only practicable with the protection of the British Government. Without being requested by the American Minister, all the arrangements for my safety and comfort from here to Bushīr, have been made by the British Minister of his own volition, with a promptness, civility, and thoughtfulness, that could not have been surpassed had I been a British subject.

The American Minister occupies a rented house in an unfrequented part of the quarter. The First Secretary is an experienced diplomat, who does all in his power to maintain a proper standard; whereas the Minister is an elderly gentleman of merit and estimable qualities, but unpolished, untidy, and utterly unable to realise the dignity of his position as the official representative of a Great Power. While all the other Ministers have official carriages, the American Minister drives about in a common cab from the square, and complains when obliged to hire for the day a decent carriage in which to make an official call on the newly-arrived Turkish Ambassador. This may seem, but is not, a matter of slight importance. Whatever may be true elsewhere, in the Orient no one is respected who does not maintain a certain

style and dignity. Their realisation of this vital truth is one of the qualities which account for the success of the British in the East. The shabby standard maintained by the American Minister here, is not a question which concerns him as an individual alone, inasmuch as it causes the country he represents to be looked down upon by all Persians.

The lamentable policy of our Government—which gives its foreign representatives inadequate salaries, and makes no provision for housing them in fixed residences befitting their dignity—renders it impossible for any man not possessed of a large private income to accept a diplomatic appointment. This is of course a cynical negation of the democratic ideal we pretend to uphold; it also causes American Embassies and Legations to lack the established and dignified position occupied by representatives of even the least important Powers. The world over, American Ambassadors are little more than travellers having official relations with the courts to which they may chance to be accredited. Under these circumstances, it is not to be expected that the American Legation here can be compared to the British, or the French, or even the Turkish; but it is reasonable to demand that its chief shall maintain conditions of moderate efficiency. The American Minister's intentions are amiable, but there is good reason to believe that in important affairs, he lacks initiative as much as he does in

the small matters under my personal observation. At twelve o'clock I have found the American Legation deserted,—with the chancellery doors open for anyone to walk through and take what he pleases, but not a servant to be roused by ringing and knocking, however prolonged.

To-day at the Shāh's *salām*, as the New Year's reception is called, my shame for the way my country is represented here, reached its keenest. The mistaken tradition which obliges our envoys to appear at foreign courts in the costume of waiters, is regrettable at all times. Good breeding demands that a man conform to the customs of those around him, as far as is compatible with his own self-respect. To decree that our Ministers shall refuse compliance with the requirements of court etiquette, is an act of provincial bad manners. To imagine that the dress of our diplomats has a Spartan simplicity, which befits democracy and commands respect, is a mistake no one who has ever seen them at a European capital, will ever make. The truth is: their appearance only excites ridicule, tempered by the amount of respect in which they may happen to be held as individuals. In the days when we sent such men as Franklin abroad, the simplicity of their dress amid the embroidered extravagance of royal courts, did attract attention and often admiration; but it should be remembered that this dress was appropriate, in so much as it was—however simple—a form of court costume. Franklin did not appear

at Versailles in the same clothes that were worn by the men who served the table of Louis XVI. Our present custom would certainly be condemned by the very founders of our country, whose traditions it is supposed to continue. No one wishes to see American envoys in the elaborate costume worn by the representatives of a monarchy; but there can be no valid objection to their wearing a simple uniform—unless it also be held “undemocratic” in our soldiers to wear uniform. Could every American citizen see the sorry figure which our representatives cut in the midst of the uniformed envoys of the Powers, great and small—particularly at the reception of an Eastern sovereign, however enfeebled,—our nation might be less indifferent to conditions obtaining in the American Diplomatic Service.

The *salām* which gives rise to these reflections, is a very disappointing affair; for this year, all the spectators—except members of the Diplomatic Corps—are placed in a room next to the throne-room, where they can see nothing of interest. The windows overlook a large courtyard with groups of cypress-trees, where the Diplomatic Corps faces us in handsome uniforms (with the exception of the two American representatives), ranged in rows in front of the colonnade where the Shāh is to appear. A number of soldiers march by, a shrill trumpet announces the Shāh's presence, and a few notabilities in wonderful robes of old Kashmir shawls, make obeisance; then all is over,

without our having so much as a glimpse of the unfortunate youth who nominally rules over Persia.

The Royal Palace is a most unattractive place. The courts are filled with painted figures of cast-iron in a kind of operatic Romeo's costume, and with boys of gilt iron offering vermilion cups to gilt eagles. The tanks are stagnant and shabby, the gardens neglected. The rooms are horrible even for one of those monuments of bad taste called Royal Palaces; the walls are covered with mirrors, and a decoration made of small pieces of mirror set in elaborate patterns, the effect reminding one of a wedding-cake. The furniture is without exception European, of poor quality and worse taste; there is not a single one of those exquisite works of Persian art which in the collections of Europe arouse enthusiasm—not so much as a fine carpet. Neither the famous Peacock Throne—so long erroneously thought to be the one built for the Great Moghāl and looted by Nādir Shāh—nor any of the jewels, are now exhibited. Local gossip believes them to have been broken up and sold in Europe by the present government.

Since arriving at Tīhrān, there has been some doubt whether I shall be able to travel from Shīrāz to Bushīr with safety. It appears that the *khāns* (great chiefs) are disaffected on account of the establishment of a *gendarmerie*, which interferes with their levying illegal road-tolls and other

forms of extortion. Brigandage is also rife, since the robbers, who feared the power of the late Shāh, have no dread of the present Constitutional Government, its weakness being patent. Altogether Persia is in a condition of anarchy and insecurity unknown twenty years ago. Last November an unsuccessful attempt was made to capture a noted brigand, but order was supposedly restored by the bringing up of guns and extra troops from Bushīr. In February the Swedish officer commanding the Persian *gendarmes* at Kazarūn (between Shīrāz and Bushīr) resolved to make prisoner a *khān* who openly sided with the forces of disorder. While placing a charge of gunpowder at the house-door of the besieged *khān*, the Swedish officer was killed and his body thrown down a well. The *gendarmes* were then attacked and driven back to their barracks, where they and the widow of the Swedish officer were besieged for some days. A young French officer—on his way to Bushīr on a mission—hearing the sound of fighting, entered the barracks under cross-fire, and probably saved the Swedish lady's life by encouraging the men to hold out until relief came. Colonel B.—the young American who remained after Mr. Shuster's departure to try and form a Persian army at Shīrāz—led a relief force with Maxim guns from Shīrāz, but the besieged had been relieved before he reached Kazarūn. There is, however, good reason to believe that his arrival saved the town from complete

destruction at the hands of the enraged *gendarmes*. It is therefore easy to realise that this road is not a very peaceful place at present; but, after communicating with the Consul at Shīrāz, the British Minister has finally consented to my starting.

Wearied of his inefficiency, I have discharged my "artist," Āghājān; and—after a week's search for what appears to be a rare creature in Ṭīhrān—have engaged a guide and interpreter called Ḥusayn, a name commemorating the martyr of Karbalā. He is a diminutive person, neatly dressed, with the appearance of a shopkeeper rather than a guide; he speaks fairly fluent French, and some German and Turkish; he was born in this city of Turkish parents, and has curiously enough spent two years in Wiesbaden. I am hoping he may prove an improvement on his predecessor.

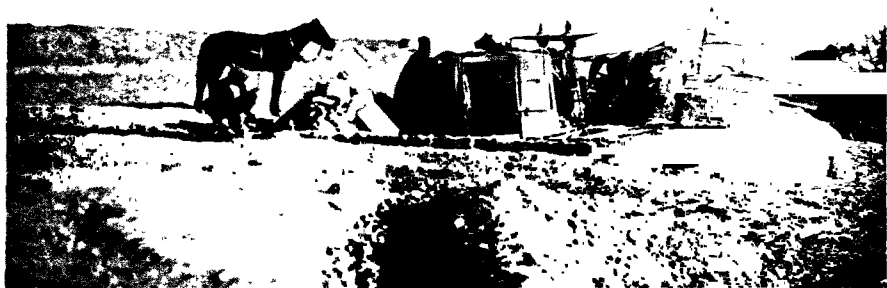
As no vehicles for passengers and luggage like those in which I travelled from Mashhad, are to be hired for the journey to Isfahān, my first intention was to take a carriage and send my luggage by post in care of a *gendarme* who is to make the trip this week. But I discovered that nothing but wrecks of carriages could be hired, since—this being a time of pilgrimage—all the decent ones are on the road between here and Qum, where the shrine of the Imām Riḍā's sister Fāṭima is situated. At a friend's suggestion, I have therefore decided to take a *fourgon*, like the one I had for two days on the Khurāsān road, put my luggage in the



Doorway of the Mosque, Qum
 Photograph by E. Bristow, Esq.



The Shrine of Fātima, Qūm
 The square is paved with the graves of pilgrims
 Photograph by E. Bristow, Esq.



The Joys of Travel in Persia: What Happens when the Driver's
Last Pipe of Opium was Strong



In the Desert near Kāshān

bottom, and place mattresses on top of it for Saïd and myself. The prospect of travelling six days in a waggon with no springs, I find alarming; but my acquaintance insists that, with mattresses, it will be comfortable. It has been ordered for five o'clock to-morrow morning, as the post starts for Isfahān the same day, and I wish to keep ahead of it in order to avoid difficulty in obtaining horses. The *nā'ib* (head of the post service) has been menaced with catastrophe if it is late, and offered large rewards in case it is on time; I am therefore hoping to make a peaceful departure from Ṭihrān.

March 26th

My hopes were vain; at five o'clock, to my surprise, the *fourgon* was at the hotel door; but there were no signs of Ḥusayn, whom I had ordered to sleep at the hotel and fetch the waggon at half-past four. Saïd and I loaded the cart, and arranged the mattresses on top of the luggage as deftly as possible; finally at six o'clock Ḥusayn appeared with eyes half out of his head, looking as though a last night in the capital had been too much for him. I fear that I have jumped from the frying-pan into the middle of the fire.

When we start, it is broad daylight although not yet sun-up. The road as far as Shāh Abdu'l 'Azīm is abominable. Over the trees the shrine is just visible: a dome with crumbling tiles of

emerald and sapphire, a lofty minaret beside another cupola glistening with new gilt, and a third one patterned with multi-coloured tiles. The pinnacles are garnished with storks'-nests, where the ludicrous birds clap their bills loudly while feeding the young. We soon meet a caravan of pilgrims returning from Karbalā, a spot hallowed by the death and burial of 'Ali's son Ḥusayn, whom all Shi'ites adore almost as a Redeemer. The pilgrims are travelling in *kajāwa*, small wooden platforms with a railing on three sides and a hood. These peculiar boxes—open on one side—are slung in pairs on a mule's back, where men and women squat in them cross-legged, swaying about like animals in cages.

The road—rising slowly through barren country—has a more civilised appearance than the one from Mashhad. There are *gendarmerie* posts, and even toll-gates at either end of a stretch of real macadam. My *fourgon* jolts abominably and is most uncomfortable, notwithstanding the mattress on which I am lying with my back propped up by cushions. The post-house where I halt to eat luncheon, stands opposite a walled garden, in which the boughs are beginning to wrap themselves in a haze of vivid emerald. Winter is at an end, for birds are singing and it is really hot. In front of me, a man is seated on the ground, hammering to bits a white cone—the form in which Persian sugar is sold.

The road now crosses a veritable desert, inter-

rupted by fluted ridges shaped like a huge periwinkle shell; sometimes they follow each other in serried rows, at others occur isolated and much larger. In tone, they are ashes of rose fading to pale dove-colour, the level spaces being a metallic shade of greyish green. Far behind us, the snow mountains—with Damāwand's soaring cone—are visible through the haze, their bases so faint the white peaks seem to float on air. At the next relay a horse has to be shod before we can start; he has been in the stable for hours, but no one thought of shoeing him until we arrived. The Persian shoe is peculiar—a very thin plate of metal covering the entire hoof, except where a hole is cut near the back. This time the horses have little bells, whose jingle is audible above the crashing of the *fourgon* and the clank of its iron chains. The dust, caught up by wind, whirls across the desert like a troop of ghosts. A drearier view would be hard to find. When we stop to change horses, a broken brougham—held together by yards of rope—is standing in front of the caravan-serai, with a very smart lady-goat sitting on the seat looking out of the window. It is so like a scene in *Through the Looking Glass*, I am surprised the goat does not speak to me.

When we leave, a most amusing little black dog follows, running about the waggon in every direction and refusing to go home. The road rises abruptly across a waste of boulders, close to a high and rubbly hill, almost violet powdered with

brown. Below us, the plain we have just crossed stretches away mile after mile, with the distance drawing its ridges together into wrinkled lines—like waves solidified—varying from deep brown to cream yellow. On reaching the crest, there is a view out through a gap in the hill to a streaked and isolated mountain, really rufous, but now darkened to brown by a cloud-shadow covering all but the lowest spurs. Around it a plain extends as far as the eye can carry, like a torpid sea of some liquid heavier than water—one of those magical seas in *The Arabian Nights*. In one place deposits of salt make faint lines of azured silver, not to be distinguished from the tide advancing across desolate shores. This acrid scenery has one beauty, constantly changing colour and shadow. As we descend, the nearer hills are all but black; then—when the sun emerges from clouds—they glow with ruddy brown, and the mountain of barren earth flushes burnt-siena. Then everything fades and grows dim again, until nothing but an expanse of false sea far across the misty plain still shines like an opal. . . . This beauty, nevertheless, is of death and desolation, suggesting eternal sterility or cataclysmic ravin. The sight of it neither cheers nor rests the mind; on the contrary, it grows tense with an almost physical sense of tautness, until—fatigued by monotony—it turns in the void, brooding on unpleasant thoughts.

Gradually as the light dies, everything in sight

grows ashen. By the roadside a caravan of camels kneels or strides slowly to drink. Up and down, we rattle through the dreariness of barren hills, with a few wild clouds trailing across the darkened sky. All things suggest gloom. When night has blotted out everything but the horses' heads, we reach one of the telegraph-stations, where the Telegraph Department maintains a decent room for travellers. The driver insists that he will not stay here, as it is between relays; but nothing can force me to go on to a caravanserai. The little black dog has followed us all afternoon, and is now playing about, waiting to be caressed. Having been fed with bits of bread, he decides to lie on my feet. It is a warm spring night with doors and windows wide open, a welcome change from winter and the acrid smoke with which caravanserai chimneys fill the rooms.

March 27th

In the pale light before sunrise, I find a rufous plain lying below me, with snow-peaks visible in the far distance, lustreless and—like the sky—awaiting sun-up to spring into life. The air is filled with a strident noise of two baby camels, clamouring for their mother to feed them. We start without disputes, but at the first relay find there are no horses, except a tired team that has just arrived. As my animals have only been driven a couple of miles, I insist on keeping them

for the next stage; the *na'ib* makes no objection, but the driver—who was so troublesome last night—is unwilling to go further, and becomes so obstreperous, he has to be well shaken before starting.

From here the road descends to the plain, crosses it, and ascends again, in an absolutely straight line—mile after mile—bordered by iron-telegraph poles with cross-pieces at the top, rising out of little mounds like enormous sepulchral monuments. They lend a sinister aspect to the depressing waste, across which our progress seems eternal. To the left, lies what I yesterday took for salt deposits, but is really a vast shallow lake, looking like a steel surface shining in the sunlight veiled by haze that is unpleasantly hot. The road appears endless and the plain without limit; when at last we begin to climb the opposite incline, it is still worse. The heat burns the skin, and the ceaseless clanking of the waggon chains, as well as the continual jolting, seem unendurable. After two hours, during which we have made no apparent advance along the unswerving road, a carriage comes into sight, crawling toward us until it stops to exchange horses. It is a very dilapidated brougham with a *gendarme* on the box beside the post-driver; inside are an elderly woman with features hardened by experience, a child, and an adolescent in breeches and English riding-boots. They are talking French, so we converse—while the horses are being changed—about the detest-

able nature of Persian drivers. They are travelling from Sulṭānābād to Ṭihrān. In such places curiosity is lively concerning those one meets on the road, and it is impossible not to wonder who these peculiar French-speaking, but obviously not French, people are, where they came from originally, what ill fortune sent them to Persia, and what their relations are to each other.

Travelling alike across this endless desolation, we start again in our opposite directions, after a few moments in which we eyed one another enquiringly, wondering what existence was crossing what. In the burning light the road rises before us, a line of white along which we seem doomed always to crawl. The *fourgon* rattles and creaks; the chains jangle; the wheels strike an inequality every few minutes, leave the ground, and come down again with a terrific jolt. Saïd and I are thrown about like peas in a saucepan. The shaking and incessant noise make this Persian vehicle a veritable instrument of torture. I would pay anything to secure even so wretched an omnibus as the one in which I arrived at Ṭihrān. Finally, after many hopes have been deceived, we reach the summit of a barren ridge, where an inscribed tablet beside the road indicates the spot whence pilgrims can first see the holy shrine at Qum. I can discern nothing, perhaps because lacking the eyes of faith.

From here we descend to a place called Manzariyyah, where I arrive exhausted and with nerves

exacerbated. A large and elaborate caravanserai is visible from where I am resting and trying to lunch. Looking at its flat tiled surfaces, I am struck with the differences between the architectures of the North and the South. In northern countries, where there is but little sun and that comparatively weak, flat surfaces are monotonous and bright colours offensively harsh. Fine materials—such as stone—being easy to procure, they are employed in ways which show their beauty. Plans are complicated, and the architectural forms both elaborate and diversified by the play of light and shade; surfaces are richly carved and adorned with salient mouldings that cast deep shadows. In the South, materials are usually small and common; they are therefore used to build a stout core, which is then veneered with more precious substances. Carvings and mouldings are almost impossible to make under these conditions. The disposition of a building is, for this reason, simplified to the utmost: nothing but large masses, in arrangements of almost childish simplicity, and bare surfaces only pierced by absolutely indispensable apertures. Then over all is laid a coating of precious marble or jewel-like tiles, whose brilliant colours flash in the splendour of a southern sun. While perfect, these simple and bejewelled buildings are very beautiful; when dilapidated, their lack of solid and noble masses, and their dependence for effect on perfect surfaces, give them a shabby and repellent aspect,

which the most neglected ruin never has in the North.

From Manzariyyah the road passes down and across an undulatory but absolutely barren plain. (I have begun to detest even the sound of these words.) The sky is veiled in sullen grey. One ridge in the far distance is purple, like a moor in heather-blossom season; but for the most part, everything in sight is the colour of ashes and burnt earth. Anything so waste and unlovely as these Persian landscapes, I have never seen; there is not a tree or a shrub except around the rare villages. There is neither the diversity in form and colour of the Algerian high plateaus, or even of the Sahara with its green oases. To intensify the ghastliness, skeletons and carcasses in every stage of decay line the road; whitened camel bones and skulls are everywhere, and are even used to solidify mud walls or dam an irrigation canal. Loathsome carrion—once a mule or horse or dog—meets the traveller with frequency. At every turn disease, decay, and death, stalk unmasked in Persia. Journeying with enforced slowness, the mind wearies and aches almost physically, until it feels as blighted as the land itself.

After disappointments without end on reaching ridges, each of which I thought must surely be the last; the minarets and golden dome of Fāṭima's shrine come into view, and after driving through dreary streets, the post-house at Qum is finally reached. My first thought is to find a carriage

for the rest of the journey, as I would spend my last farthing, or stay here for months, rather than travel another hour in that diabolical *fourgon*; I am so lucky as to secure a fairly decent diligence. The post-house is quite an elaborate two-storey building with fairly clean rooms—the first public lodging-place at all attractive that I have met with in Persia. My room looks down on a garden where green grass is growing high, and where there are trees plentifully powdered with minute blossoms of deep purple, as well as others burgeoning with the vivid emerald of their first leaves. Around the corner is an orchard with walls of dried clay, filled with small trees of feathery green, above which rise the bare but empurpled boughs of taller ones, or here and there the milky flowers of a fruit-tree. This view rests me at once, since after such a journey nothing is so refreshing as the sight of green nature in all its beauty.

At no great distance beyond the walls, the shrine of Fāṭima looms—with even details visible. First of all, I see the upper portion of a great entrance archway tiled with blue; on top of it, but off the axis, is a small pagoda with a roof of pale green. To the left of this are two very tall but slender minarets covered with tiles of pale turquoise striped with yellow and white. Further back is another wall, pierced by an arch and surmounted by two minarets like the others only smaller. They terminate in open, almost Chinese cages,

and are connected by wires from which lanterns depend. Still further off and dominating all, is the great gold dome that shines and seems to leap out of the picture on even so dull a day as this.

Strolling out, a few hundred yards bring me to the river, where camels are gathered on the dry and pebbly bed, with the mosque towering over the houses on the opposite bank. The river-bed is spanned by a curious bridge rising from either end toward the centre, where there are two pinnacles of blue tile. The further end abuts on a gateway with the customary tiles, pinnacles, and mosaic of a combatant; and is flanked by small buildings of brick and plaster, strangely like rococo work in Europe. A line of low houses, built of mud brick with flat roofs, overhangs the river-bed of stones and grey sand, where water runs in divers channels occupying only a small part of the wide expanse. Camels are drinking, men wading, and small boys playing where the muddy rills rush through the dry bed. The whole scene is—like all Qum—dominated by the aspiring minarets and gilded cupola of Fātima's shrine. Looking down stream, there is a little settlement where a turquoise cone is prominent with green grain growing beside it; here the numerous *imām zādas* repose; further away a line of dull blue hills, and behind that the majestic cone of Damāwand soaring into the grey. As the day is overcast, it is half lost in the sky; yet light falls on it somehow,

making it brighter than the all but invisible snow ranges, over which it hangs like a vision.

From the bridge a vaulted passage leads to the Maidān—a very long and comparatively narrow “square”—at the further end of which the dome, minarets, and pagodas of the sacred shrine, rise picturesquely above the cream-coloured enclosure walls. It is as strange a public square as ever existed; for it is nothing more or less than a great cemetery, where those are buried who seek vicarious sanctity in the proximity of their ashes to the tomb of Fāṭima. There is scarcely an inch between the graves, which are marked by slabs built with brick, sometimes with an inscribed marble tablet; for the most part, however, they are nameless, as Orientals display an indifference to perpetuating the identity of their remains that is wise, but difficult for Europeans to understand. In one or two cases, the burial-place of some notable person is marked by a conventionalised lion roughly blocked out in stone, standing defiantly on guard over the grave. The surfaces of the tombs are uneven, and make walking very difficult; but men and women stroll about, display wares for sale, or even lie asleep on a funeral slab beside their burdens, utterly oblivious of the charnel nature of the place.

The shrine stretches entirely across one end of the square, and far to the right. The original mosque, where the dust of Fāṭima rests, lies to one side; it is flanked by a large mosque with two

soaring minarets, recently built by a great man who lived here after his disgrace by Muzaffaru'd-Dīn Shāh. The golden dome is resplendent among the four lofty minarets, much as a great yellow tulip might be among loftier lilies. The walls at the end of the square, enclose the court of the modern mosque, terminating in great gateways, small domes, and minarets. Viewed across this vast mortuary expanse, the shrine, with all its slender minarets seeking the sky like great arrows, is extremely picturesque. Access to it is of course rigorously forbidden unbelievers; but I am allowed to walk about the court of the *madrasa*—or university—situated in front of the shrine proper, to which it gives direct entrance. The enclosure is laid out in broad brick walks, with a square tank in the centre; the spaces between these paths being divided by dykes of earth into small rectangles, where there is either tall grass or the stubble of that recently reaped. There are a few bare trees and three noble cypresses. The arcades running along the sides, open into little cells for students, now quite abandoned—whether temporarily or for all time, who knows? In the centre of all four sides of the court, is the usual great portal-arch, three of them in advanced decay, but still conserving a few tiled panels, where birds and fruit are depicted on a background of lovely yellow; the fourth is larger and in better repair: a flight of steps leads up to its door, across which a chain is festooned to prohibit unbelievers, and mark the

spot where *bast* or sanctuary begins—whence no man (whatever his crime) may be dragged. Through the doorway, I can see the base of a great flag-pole, surrounded by a railing, in the centre of the court; and beyond that an enormous candelabra with lanterns hanging in front of the vast door of the shrine, which is concealed by crimson curtains looped up at one side. It is irritating to be forbidden ingress; however, standing outside, the adventures of that Gamber Ali who here took *bast*, in the wonderful tale by the great but little-read writer, Gobineau; and the visit of that magnificent Faṭḥ ‘Alī Shāh, the dust of whose broad shoulders, wasp waist, and ambrosial beard, lies interred within,—are probably far more real to me than if I stood in the sanctuary itself.

At the top of the steps leading to the shrine door, a white-headed old man is seated, chanting or rather screaming in a constantly ascending scale. Ḥusayn tells me he is praising the name of ‘Alī and vigorously cursing the ‘Umayyad Khalifs, according to the custom once universal among Shī‘ites. This neglected old court outside the famous shrine, is a charming place, perhaps the pleasantest I have found in Persia; but the abandoned cells where students once toiled, give poignancy to the recollection of Jāmī’s lines:—

“The guests have drunk the wine and are departed,
Leaving their empty bowls behind—not one
To carry on the revel, cup in hand!”

March 28th

Last night a wild wind sprang up, whirling the dust in clouds. As night fell, the lanterns suspended between the minarets of Fāṭima's shrine, began to fleck the blackness with dots of gold. Then the wind raged in torment through the dark, and all night at intervals I heard that passing sound of camel-bells, which hereafter will always for me evoke Persia.

When Said called me at four o'clock, it was still night with no sign of dawn; but now—a little after five—darkness is in rapid retreat before a cold grey light. When my newly rented diligence has been made ready, we start across the hardby bridge; the river-bed is at this hour so dark a grey it almost appears black; while the tiles on Fāṭima's shrine glisten like the scales of a fish still wet. This half-light is, nevertheless, quite different from that at evening; crepuscular light suggests death; here the rays, even when feeble, have a glitter which instantly suggests force growing into life. In the bazars it is night yet, with little lanterns hung at intervals still burning; a man precedes us on foot to clear the way, our horse-bells jangling the while. When we reach the outskirts of the city, the eastern sky is of gold, and the western delicately streaked with rosy cloudlets. To one side stand four or five octagonal brick pavilions surmounted by conical roofs, from which nearly all the tiles have fallen, but each one crowned by a large stork's-nest. When we emerge from the

last buildings, the sun is just swinging over the horizon through the keen fresh air; all around us are bright fields of green grain and tinted hills. Before long we pass a white something on the other side of a field; in the distance it looks like a pillar of salt hewn into a rough likeness of a human form. It is the body of a man who has been *gached*; that is to say, surrounded with wet plaster until crushed to death. This barbarous punishment is still in use in hodiernal Persia; in a land where the great nobles appropriate vast sums of public money, death was, in the present instance, inflicted in this atrocious manner upon a man who had stolen a few cucumbers, by a *gendarme* belonging to the force organised by Swedish officers! This particular soldier had one moment of humanity, since he shot the tortured creature through the head at the end of several hours of agony. This horrid object bedims all the freshness of early morning, filling me with loathing for what human nature sometimes becomes.

We are now in the midst of waste country, skirting a toothed ridge with snow-peaks behind it. The road winds upward, with the desert to left of us stretching as far as eye can reach—at first reddish brown, then buff fading to cream, with white streaks where salt deposits occur. The colours of this scenery are very fine, but it soon grows wearisome, not so much on account of its monotony, as because its aridity depresses. Colour is also beautiful in countries less barren; the

hues of a great sea of tossing boughs, viewed from a hill-crest, are quite as lovely and have the advantage of being live. This is desolation and death—nature in her most sterile, if not her most cruel mood. However, it is such a relief to ride in a carriage with springs, after two days spent in a *fourgon*, that everything seems pleasant.

At the noon relay there is not a single horse, so we have to wait until ours have been fed and rested. When this happens—as it does frequently—one is torn between a desire to spare the wretched beasts, and eagerness to hurry their rest, so as to finish the greatest possible number of the weary miles ahead. During the next stage, there are more signs of life than usual. Our driver is particularly bestialised; all of them smoke a mixture of opium that stupefies their already small intelligence, and this fellow has probably just had a strong pipe-full. No one who realises what their life must be can however blame them, since to such misery some form of intoxication is a necessity, not a vice. . . . Ahead of us is a mud bridge, beyond which the road turns at a right angle. When we cross, the driver manages to let the hind wheels slip off the bridge; the diligence drops, then sways violently from side to side as though about to turn over. I seize the side, but expect the carriage to right itself, as it has always done so on similar occasions. This time, however, it gives a tremendous lurch, and there is no doubt whatever that it is going to upset. I clutch the

railing on the roof, running no particular risk since I am on the upper side, but am afraid lest my feet strike Saïd as we go over on his side. He is in real danger of being flung out and crushed under the luggage-laden roof; instead of thinking about himself, he puts up one arm to support me. With another lurch and a terrific crash, the diligence turns completely over on its side. Fortunately it falls slowly, and Saïd is unhurt. When we pick ourselves up, we are imprisoned in a cage higher than our shoulders. Climbing out, I find that the driver has fallen gently from the box onto an inclined bank of earth, where he could not possibly hurt himself; notwithstanding, he is lying on his belly—writhing and rubbing his back. Husayn crawls out from the rear compartment unhurt but whimpering like a baby. Saïd dives into the wreckage, rescues my camera, and hands it to me with the remark, that a photograph of this will make a pleasant souvenir of a trip through Persia. At first it looks as though one of the horses had broken his hind leg, but it turns out that he is only pinned down under the traces; by some miracle neither carriage-pole, wheels, nor axles, are broken. Luckily we are near a village, so men who have been working in the fields, come to our assistance. Of course the driver wishes to raise the waggon with two of the horses still harnessed to it, and a third pulling in a position where the carriage, in righting itself, would probably crush him. After a long struggle

the diligence is finally set on its wheels again, quite unharmed; I can scarcely believe my eyes, for I had visions of staying at the village indefinitely, while someone went back to Qum to fetch another conveyance. When the luggage has been reloaded, and my scattered kit packed in the carriage again, we end this break in the monotony of travel by sedately driving up to the post-house for a change of horses.

Then we start across a sandy plain, broken by green fields of cereal. The going is very bad, and the weary animals scarcely able to crawl. The sunset is impressive: a wisp of liquid gold, with flames of pink whirling across a sky of robin's-egg blue. As light and colour die, a new moon mounts through the darkness—its entire orb faintly visible above a thin white crescent. When night has fallen, I tie my own lantern to the side of the carriage, since it would be impossible to advance otherwise. The sound of wheels dragging through sand grows irksome, and the stage seems endless. Gradually the smell of verdure, borne on the night air, tells me we are passing through cultivated fields, so Kāshān must be close at hand. The road runs through a kind of gully, up whose embankments the coachman keeps driving, while I expect to upset every minute. About eight o'clock we reach the post-house only to learn that we must drive back to find the rest-rooms in the telegraph-station, outside the walls on the road by which we entered. Travellers soon begin to

look forward eagerly to the nights spent in the clean and comfortable quarters maintained for their use by the Indo-European Telegraph Department. Nevertheless I go to bed, cursing the day I started to travel in the most uninteresting country I have ever seen.

March 29th

We arrived too late last night to make as early a start as usual this morning; so I wake to find a radiant sun already up. Green fields of grain, a-glitter in the sunlight and varying from emerald to yellow green, stretch away to the walls of the city—the usual collection of mud houses with a great dome in the centre, without tiles and looking as though it always had been so. Kāshān may have been an interesting place in the days when: “A more industrious and civil People, or a town better governed, Persia elsewhere has not”; but this morning neither it nor the nearby pleasure-dwelling of Shāh ‘Abbās, can detain me. My habitual desire to linger and see all I can, died on the road to Tīhrān; now my only thought is to reach places—indeed, I am beginning to sympathise with persons who boast of the short time they spent in going from town to town. Ḥusayn manages to have things ready in the morning, and so far we have started without disputes and blows; it must however be due to luck, for he is proving even a sorrier specimen of manhood than Āghājān.

Beyond Kāshān the road crosses a real sand desert, which makes progress laborious. To the right are jagged black mountains capped with snow, which seems peculiar on summits apparently so low. On the left, yellow dunes of sand undulate toward a line of small hills: first an expanse of violet-grey that appears to rise like a wall; then pointed rocks, blackish and streaked with lavender, grey, and even white. These hills are so dark, it is difficult to recognise in them anything so suggestive of brilliance as violet and lavender; but close scrutiny shows them to be really striped with dull shades of these colours. The coachman is hidden from me by a wooden partition, but I suspect him of frequently falling asleep; so Saïd and I keep putting our heads out, and invariably find him stretched on the box in deep slumber, from which he has to be aroused by shouts and poking with a stick. Probably the driver was more or less asleep when he upset us yesterday—an experience I have no desire to repeat. A large dirty grey vulture, with a loathsome neck and beak, is devouring a camel's putrid carcass beside the road. Had Baudelaire travelled in Persia, his celebrated verses could not have described these scenes with greater accuracy:—

“ Au détour d'un sentier une charogne infâme
Sur un lit semé de cailloux,

Les jambes en l'air comme une femme lubrique,
Brûlante et suant les poisons,
Ouvrait d'une façon nonchalante et cynique
Son ventre plein d'exhalaisons."

During the next stage our driver remains awake, a fact I realise by the way he chirrup steadily to his horses. This real desert of dust, stone, and sand, is for some reason—perhaps because it really is desert—less trying than the barren scenery of yesterday. Occasionally we pass a chain of those wells which are so frequent a sight in Persia, lining the roads with yellow mounds like giant ant-hills. They are close together and connected by tunnels at the bottom, making an aqueduct to bring water from the hills. Whenever anyone wishes to draw water, a rude windlass is placed across the well-mouth; apparently this does not happen often, for I have seldom seen water being drawn. It would seem as though work and money might make the barren land fruitful here in Persia; for it is astonishing to see how patches of grain grow in the midst of what appears a desert, whenever a man has had enterprise enough to till and irrigate it.

At the relay my driver, like all Persians, never says "thanks" for his tip. I am told that the Persian language contains no such word; this may be a libel; but it is certain that the poorer class has no idea of showing pleasure or gratitude in any form. They put their hands together and

hold them out to catch the coins, as though they were a handful of grain; then they look to see how much they receive, and walk off without a word. Only once or twice have I been thanked by a word or a smile for gratuities that are—when they have driven well—very generous, since it is impossible not to feel a great pity for men, however debased, who endure so wretched an existence. After lunch I rest in the shade of an archway, framing a view of tawny desert and hills of rock, across mingled squares of verdant grain and some bright yellow plant like mustard. Little birds and crested larks flit by, twittering softly. A peacefulness lying over all things, gradually begins to possess even me. As a labourer passes, the thought is borne home that, despite the fact of our both being men, there is probably not a single idea common to us. People like to dwell on the universal nature of humanity; the fact is that universality is restricted to a few more or less primitive instincts, and that the differences between widely separated civilisations are far greater than the feelings they share. Could we converse, this Persian peasant and I would scarcely find an idea comprehensible to both of us. What a mystery consciousness is! What does the bird hovering above yonder grain, experience at this moment, and in precisely what do his sensations differ from mine? The thought that we are probably both emanations of one spirit, brings to mind the Persian mystics. How, beyond all words, life must to

them have been wonderful, if they were really *conscious* of the actual presence of God, as their songs aver. To searching men, for whose consciousness God is no more than an unperceived probability, one hour of so transcendent an experience must seem worth the whole of such life as they can know. Fantastic musings to entertain in the shade beside a Persian road!

We are in a sand desert once more, where the heat is so great I have to drop the curtains to exclude the glare. In the centre of apparently boundless tracts of sand, we come upon quite a decently built house or station, with a well beside it but not a blade of green in sight. Three men appear,—what can their lives and occupations be in this terrible solitude? On we crawl, to the sound of our wheels slushing through sand. Even in this desert there are occasional flocks of goats cropping some invisible plant. Persian goats always seem to graze in a peculiar fashion, stretched out in one long line like soldiers under orders. On nearing Dihābād, a reddish heifer strolls toward us as though curious to see what we look like, forcing me to wonder what she finds to live on in this desert. A little way outside the village the telegraph employee—who has been notified by the Kāshān office—rides out to meet us. At Dihābād there is a pleasant room in the telegraph-station, opposite quarters for the employee and his family, who of course scrutinise all my movements. This being only an intermediate station,

with a telephone but no telegraph instruments, there is only a Persian workman to keep the place in order. At the regular stations the operators are almost without exception Armenians, whom Government—the line is controlled by the British Government—was obliged to substitute for the Englishmen first employed, since the solitary life soon caused them to suffer from mental and physical disorders.

The sun has set; the mountains—powdered with snow—are almost black, but the hills behind which the sun sank are bathed in a greenish haze. The sky above them is still lucent, green-gold shot with rosy shafts of light. A single star is shining amid the radiance of the west, while overhead the new moon lies in the vault of pale but intense blue like a shard of white. Sheep and cows wend through the twilight toward the village; camels and a few men are silhouetted against the fading sky—the sound of camel-bells and the voice of a man at prayer, enhancing the sense of stillness and peace.

March 30th

This morning it is impossible to leave until I discover the stable and there administer to the driver those kicks and cuffs which Loti found obligatory in Persia. When we start, the air is chill, but with advancing day it warms, as we turn our back on the desert and climb the hills

toward Khafr. Here on a little eminence dominating the village, is a curious long building like a fortress, whose use I can neither divine nor ascertain. Two dervishes are idling by the road, with their high rounded bonnets entirely covered with an embroidery of fine Arabic script, making them look like a magician's head-dress. From here, the road winds steeply upward between bleak hills; then a salt desert becomes visible far below us—misty white and grey-brown. The road does not descend toward it, but turns sharply to the right, sinking down to a half-ruined village, where there is a fine mosque with a blue dome patterned with diamond-shaped ornaments of black and white. In earlier times this hamlet must have been of sufficient importance to merit the burial of an *imām zāda* within its walls. The most superb and curly-haired hog that ever existed outside of a Dürer wood-cut, is lording it in the courtyard of the relay stable.

The road now crosses a dreary upland between low hills, under a sky of sombre grey. Armed horsemen suddenly appear ahead, galloping toward us; to be ready for all eventualities, Saïd and I prepare our revolvers, but the riders prove to be nothing more dangerous than road-guards—whom I believe quite capable of turning robber, were a solitary traveller to pass. After a little we reach a large village, where innumerable fruit-trees are in full bloom. Everywhere they spread their boughs over the earthen walls, feathery white as if



Saïd Drawing Water in the Desert



The Town of Khafr



The Dervishes of Khafr
The head-piece of the left-hand dervish is embroidered
with inscriptions



Husayn and "The Footman" Rearranging the Luggage that had to be Removed
before Passing the Main Gate

powdered with snow; here and there almond blossoms stand out in dull pastel pinks; behind the village on the hill-slope are the ruins of an old citadel—like village and hill itself—built of dried clay. In this dreary light the blossoms are really grey rather than white, and the whole scene looks like some vision of a Russian fairy land in winter; in sunlight it must typify all the glories of spring.

Wind and whirling dust, then rain; a dreary plateau of bare brown, where the road twists between earthy hillocks; a change of horses in a heavy shower; then a dismal plain with the setting sun visible through a rift between mountains and inky clouds—a wild and gloomy scene, in some strange way reminiscent of those Yorkshire moors which the genius of the Brontë sisters has for all time depicted. Night has come when we enter Murchikhurt, twisting between walled fields, then skirting the high bastioned walls of the town, looming fantastically above us in the feeble light of my lantern, with here and there rays of light falling through a hole in the fortification. My small and dirty room is situated over the gates of a fortified caravanserai, before which a stream passes like a moat.

March 31st

The sound of camel-bells drove sleep away at four o'clock, so we make an early start. The road

turns sharply to the south, running parallel to a distant mountain-range. The first village at which we halt, has real municipal spirit, inasmuch as it boasts a public shelter of dried earth for the relief of nature's necessities. It is of course built overhanging the stream that supplies the hamlet with water. Persians, I have already noticed, generally relieve themselves by preference in brooks, in which a little lower down they drink and wash. From here we have a wonderful fellow on the box beside the driver, singing lustily all the way; Saïd calls him our "footman." The minarets of Isfahān soon come into sight, then we pass between fields with curious round towers—dove-cotes I believe. Men are at work, dressed in pomegranate robes as well as the sap-green ones frequent since Ṭīhrān, all of them new for the *Nawrūz* or New Year.

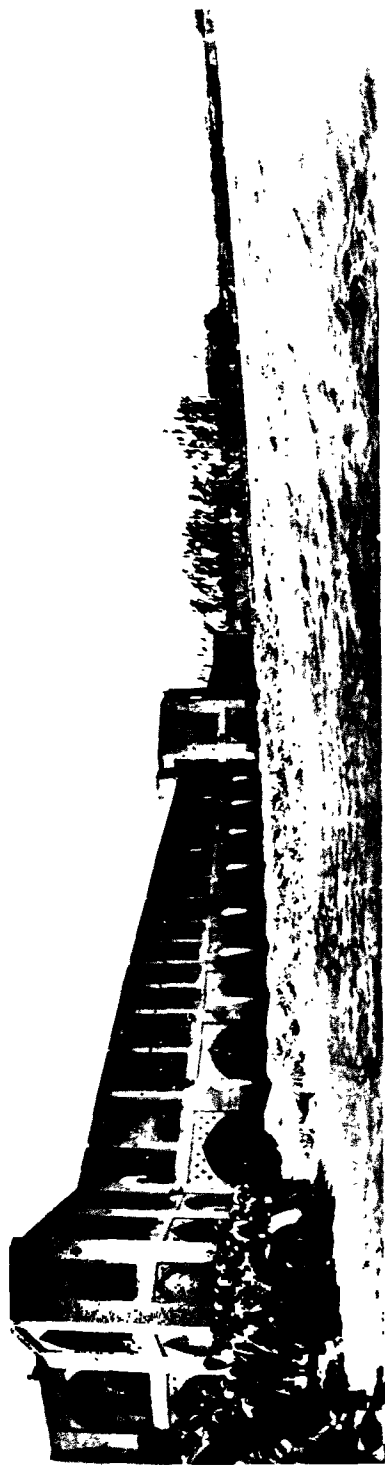
Entering the town is a perilous affair; the road rises on embankments to dilapidated bridges, where we nearly fall through or upset; then passes through deep pools of water, and under gateways of dried clay, so low the luggage must first be removed; our "footman" yelling all the while more loudly than any motor-horn in Europe. When actually within the town proper, men and women fly to right and left of us in the narrow streets, gathering up their belongings as best they can. We dash through the bazars, small boys, running ahead to clear the way in hopes of money, while our "footman" shrieks and waves his long

pipe. We all but run over two men stripped to the waist, beating themselves gently with small chains. So comic and noisy an entry into a famous city I never made before. At last we reach the gate of the British Consulate—to my surprise without injury to ourselves or others. That Isfahān is an “old city of ruins” I have perceived; but I have seen no sign either of “its mystery,” or of “its fields of white poppies and its garden of pink roses” of which Loti writes so alluringly.

April 1st

The British Consulate is a charming place in which to pass the days, while visiting Isfahān. High walls—above the heads of passers-by—enclose an old garden, where *chinārs*, still bare, grow among fruit-trees in full blossom. The one-storey white buildings are situated in groups dividing the garden into three parts; the smallest—without a sign of green—is entirely filled with young and leafless fruit-trees covered with pink flowers, some of them so dark they are almost purple. The inner garden—on which the large room I occupy, looks out—has almost no flowers except a few vermilion tulips; but the waving *chinār* and almond-trees make it pleasant. The Consul is a perfect host, gifted with the keenest sense of humour; so wherever he goes, the greatest of all boons—laughter—reigns.

This morning my first visit is to the Madrasa of Shāh Ḥusayn on the Chahār Bāgh. This famous avenue was once a glorious promenade, divided into three alleys by rows of plane-trees; palaces, marble fountains, and bushes of roses, filled the traveller with amazement. In our own time Loti has described how on his arrival: "de chaque côté de la voie, d'épais buissons de roses forment bordure; derrière, ce sont des jardins où l'on aperçoit, parmi les arbres centenaires, des maisons ou des palais, en ruines, peut-être, mais on ne sait trop, tant la feuillée est épaisse." In the reign of Shāh 'Abbās, this avenue was the scene of what a Frenchman has admitted to be "d'élégances telles que Versailles même n'en dut point connaître." Here all the splendour immortalised by Persian miniaturists really passed by in the flesh, covered with brocade and fine jewels. . . . They have long been dust, and their goodly avenue has fallen upon evil days; what even time had spared the degenerate Isfahāni have in the last twenty years utterly destroyed. The Chahār Bāgh of to-day is not more than a broad road, shabby and dusty, passing between tumble-down walls; most of the trees have been felled, and those that remain have been badly pollarded or are in decay; at this season, there is not so much as one green leaf to alleviate the ruin. The three alleys—the centre for cavaliers, and those on either side for pedestrians—have long been obliterated; of marble basins and parterres there is no sign; not even a single



Pul-i-Khaju Isfahan, with Crowd of Mauruz Holiday-Makers.
From a Photograph by E. Bristow, Esq.



The Maidan-i-Shah, Isfahan
To the left, the Lutf-Allah Mosque; in the centre the Shah's Mosque; to the right, the 'Ali Qapu
From a Photograph by E. Bristow, Esq.



A Dervish in Bukhārā
From a Photograph by Geoffrey Dodge, Esq.

rivulet runs down the dirty paths; not a rose-bush grows throughout the whole length of the devastated avenue; no palaces, no villas, no pictured balconies, overhang the promenade; nothing is left but a neglected road full of dust and desolation. Half-way down the Chahār Bāgh, the Madrasa stands, with all the tiles gone from the wings and only a few left over the entrance arch. The doors however—though battered, defiled with dust, and in places stripped of their precious coating—are still very fine; they are covered with plates of silver repoussé-work, beautifully executed, and—unlike most Persian art, which is highly conventionalised—very realistic in treatment. A huckster's stand, covered with grain and vegetables, all but fills the vestibule. Down the middle of the court, a long tank runs between the silver trunks of lofty plane-trees now denuded. Two-storey arcades with fine tiling—each arch forming the balcony of a room—enclose the courtyard, which the tank and a broad walk divide into four parterres. In the centre of one side is the entrance to a mosque. a lofty and well-proportioned archway buttressed by two soaring minarets with their terminal cages intact—the whole covered with beautiful tiling laid in intricate designs; between these a noble dome swells upward, for the most part still retaining its exquisitely blue tiles covered with scroll-patterns in black and white. Anything like the depth and intensity of the blue in these old Persian glazes, I have never seen and

probably shall never see again, since the art of making them is lost.

In the afternoon I ride out with the Consul, to watch a game of that polo which was first played here in Isfahān centuries ago, but of which the modern Persian knows no more than he does about the works of Persian art treasured in the museums of Europe. To sit a good horse in an English saddle, is a pleasure I have not experienced for many months. We cross the celebrated but disappointing bridge of 'Aliverdī Khān. Its great length makes it remarkable, but the series of small arches which compose it, lacks the effect of wider spans; while the absence of a central or important terminal motive, interrupting its monotony, causes it to look as though it had only stopped by chance. We next ride through a vast cemetery with graves, marked by flat slabs of brick, strewn among little buildings with conical roofs, or occasionally a tiled dome rising among brown walls and ruins, as a brilliant tulip might grow in a barren garden. We finally reach a plain, where the dust rises in such clouds as completely hide the polo-players. Here there is a fine view of Isfahān lying in a bare plateau, surrounded by jagged hills and distant snow-mountains. The conspicuous features are: the lapis-lazuli dome of the Shāh's Mosque, and the square silhouette of the 'Ālī Qāpū, with its pillared portico high in the air. The Madrasa cupola is also prominent, while here and there earth-coloured minarets tower over the city like

beautified chimneys. A few trees, just beginning to burgeon, spread a tinge of pale green round the walls. It is a pretty picture, but not a striking one; in my visions of Isfahān, something far nobler than this was always evoked by its sounding name.

On the way back, we ride through the bazars; it is dusk with only a half-light falling through the orifice of every vault, by which the eye can hardly descry what objects really are. This jumble of shops, wares, and people, fused into a single picture of dull brown, is extremely picturesque. We next cross the world-famous square, the Maidān-i-Shāh; it is a narrow rectangle of enormous dimensions, entirely empty except for two low pillars of stone at either end—the goal-posts employed in the games of polo that used to be played with unparalleled splendour under the Shāh's imperial eyes. The conduit—lined with marble and filled with running water—which surrounded the square in days when Isfahān filled the world with rumours of her glory, still remains; but muddy water now stagnates between broken stones in what is little better than a dirty ditch. Of the avenue of stately trees bordering the square with delicious shade, nothing remains but a few straggling trees. The square is enclosed by an endless succession of two-storey arcades of tawny brick; broken in the centre of the southern and smaller side, where the entrance to the Masjid-i-Shāh thrusts ablaze of colour through the monotonously flat walls. A great archway flanked by minarets, is recessed between

retreating wings; every inch of the surface glows with tiles of lapis-lazuli and turquoise, as intensely coloured as, and almost more brilliant than, precious stones. A broad band encircles the portal, filled with an inscription in superbly decorative Arabic script—white letters on a ground of sapphire. In order that the mosque may face toward Mecca, it has been built with its axis at an acute angle to that of the square and its own portal; the effect is peculiar, as in this way the walls of the mosque appear behind the arcades, slanting toward them far to the right of the gateway, almost at the corner of the square;—first of all, the top of an arch between its minars, then a great dome of greenish blue tile with scroll designs, then yet further to the right a small wooden pavilion perched on top of a wall, of which only the back or untiled surface is visible. Any endeavour to suggest in words the richness of colour and the intricacy of design, which turn this mosque into one vast piece of jewellery, would only result in confusion. The one thing that might suggest them, would be to imagine a Renaissance enamel enlarged a thousand-fold and set up under the brilliance of a southern sun.

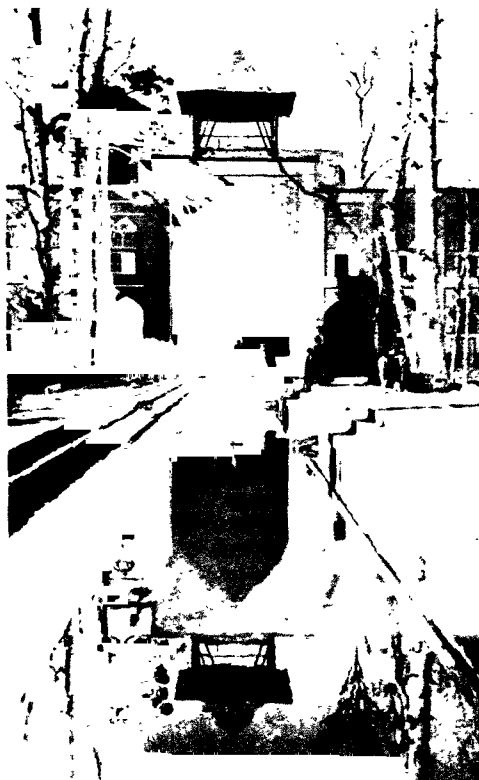
The smaller Luṭf Allāh Mosque interrupts the eastern arcade, with its low dome of brownish orange tiles covered with intricate scrolls. The northern end of the square is nearly filled by the crumbling brick walls and screens of rotting wood, which compose the three-storey entrance to the



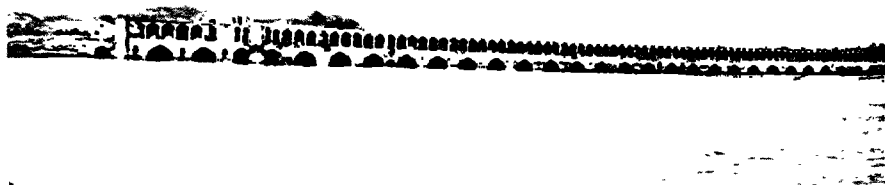
The British Consulate, Isfahān



Hindu Suwārs of the British Consulate, Isfahān



Courtyard of Shāh Husayn's Madrasa, Isfahān
 Photograph by E. Bristow, Esq.



The Bridge of 'Aliverdi Khan, Isfahān

bazars. The western side is diversified by two turrets, and the most curious building in all Isfahān—the 'Alī Qāpū. Two storeys of brick—the same height as the surrounding arcades—project far into the square. On top of this is a *tālār* or portico, where three rows of wooden shafts—slender as poles—support a wooden roof. Behind this a donjon-like building rises above the arcades and the portico roof. This small and singular edifice was a royal dwelling, in whose *tālār* the Shāh sat enthroned—with a magnificence probably never surpassed—to watch the games of polo or other ceremonies in the square below. To look up and see the Shāh with all his court in the shade of this lofty porch, must have been a sight whose like no man will ever see in our world of machines and democracy.

The 'Alī Qāpū and the whole square are ruinous and—what is worse—shabby. The reason why everything in Persia seems so sordid in its decay, is not hard to find. The Persians had little or no architectural sense, their talent being decorative; their buildings have, therefore, none of that nobility of mass and disposition which remains dignified even when ruined. The beauty of their work is entirely due to an intricate veneer of brilliant colour; when this has been damaged or lost, nothing is left but a skeleton of rotting wood and shabby brick, whose neglected aspect only inspires repulsion.

No one can help being impressed by the en-

amelled brilliance of the great mosque at the end of the square, or fail to realise that the vast extent of the Maidān-i-Shāh is in itself grandiose; none the less Loti's statement that it—"n' a d'égalé dans aucune de nos villes d'Europe, ni comme dimensions, ni comme magnificence," is frankly ridiculous. Had he recalled the existence of Rome and his own Paris, he might have moderated this hyperbole. The Maidān may cover more ground than any square in Europe, but it is not to-day—and never could have been—"magnificent," for reasons that any architect will instantly perceive. The arcades surrounding the square have neither scale nor dignity of design, and their endless repetition is monotonous. The square was not conceived as an architectural whole with a well-planned effect. The buildings that interrupt the wearisome sides, are placed haphazard and not on the axes of the square. Finally the entrance to the Shāh's Mosque, which ought to dominate everything, is recessed instead of projecting beyond the adjacent buildings. This belittles the portal itself and makes it seem crowded back; it also destroys the enclosed feeling that a public square such as this, ought to create, producing in its place a weak effect, as though the buildings had collapsed at one end. To say that this square surpasses the perfect conception of the Place de la Concorde, or even the picturesqueness of some of the Roman *piazze*, is an error of judgment. These faults notwithstanding, the Maidān-i-Shāh

is a splendid square; when, in the days of its glory, its monuments were intact, the 'Alī Qāpū ablaze with the Shāh's court, and its whole vast expanse crowded with brightly robed polo-players and spectators, it must have offered a spectacle such as no European city could ever boast.

April 2nd

In Isfahān the beggars, who in hundreds infest the streets, offer a horrid spectacle none can escape. The misery must be great, but there is no doubt that begging is a profession here. Women—veiled and unveiled—sit in the dust beside the walls, with their children drowsing across their knees, or stretched out beside them motionless like corpses. They sob or moan loudly, and must have learned to weep at command, for their face-veils are always wet. Little boys of eight or ten, quite naked with their brown skin “laced o'er” with dust, shiver as though in convulsions, yet manage to run after one, howling. The maimed and diseased of course abound, the cries and importunities of all these wretched creatures being painful to hear.

The Chihil Sutūn—or Forty Pillars—was built as a throne room by Shāh 'Abbās, in what must have been a walled garden, but is now a neglected enclosure where a few trees still grow. A high portico precedes a small building with a vast niche—the throne-chamber—behind which is a single

room; it stands on the edge of a long tank reflecting every detail. Its name—the Forty Pillars—is a subject of controversy, since the portico does not contain half that number; some think that the number refers to the columns and their reflections; but as these do not total forty, it is probable that forty was used to indicate a large number—just as we use the word hundred. The shafts of the colonnade are of wood, as slim as masts, with elaborate honeycomb capitals. The ceiling of the porch still shows traces of brilliant colour elaborately designed; but of the small pieces of mirror which encrusted, as with shining scales, every inch of the walls and columns, nothing is left except in the recess where the throne was placed. Lord Curzon mentions that this coating of mirror-work held in place by gilded lines, existed under a coat of paint when he was in Isfahān; but to-day the closest scrutiny can find no trace of it under the green paint covering the walls. The bare columns have fortunately been left unpainted. This incrustation with bits of mirror could never have been in itself a beautiful decoration; but in sunlight the effect must have been gorgeous, when the Shāh was seated on his throne, surrounded by all his court, and every facet flashed with the multi-coloured reflections of jewels and brocades, while the whole scene lay duplicated on the surface of the tank below. Even to-day, as one stands at the further end of the pool, the Chihil Sitūn rising atop of its inverted image, forms a melancholy

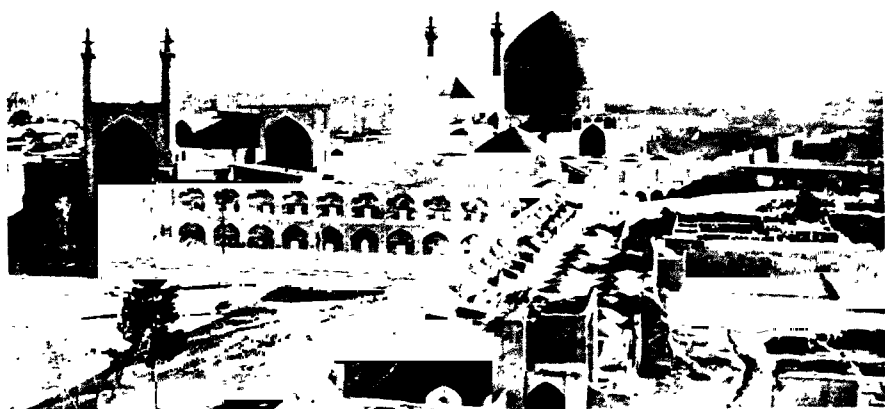
picture full of charm. The pitiful thing is that man has done far more than time to wreck the glories of Isfahān; wherever I go here, I am reminded of the unconsciously expressive word employed by Āghājān in his halting translations, when on the road to Ṭihrān my Persian hosts used to tell me how I would have admired Isfahān before the last fifteen years had "*broken*" it. . . . In the side porch of the Chihil Sutūn, the vandal paint has spared two amusing pictures of men in the costume of Louis XIII, undoubtedly executed in the reign of his contemporary Shāh 'Abbās, who brought European artisans to Persia. As a result Persian pictures in the European style—often of the Holy Family—are frequently to be found. The large apartment behind the throne-room, contains a series of wall paintings of the highest interest, depicting the court of Shāh 'Abbās. They represent ceremonies and feasts—even the intoxication of this magnificent Muhammadan monarch—and abound in curious representations of the customs, costumes, and furniture of the day.¹

A short walk brings me to the 'Alī Qāpū, which I only saw from the outside yesterday. Across the gate that gives the building its name—the Sublime Porte—hangs a chain wrapped in rags, conferring the right of sanctuary on whoever

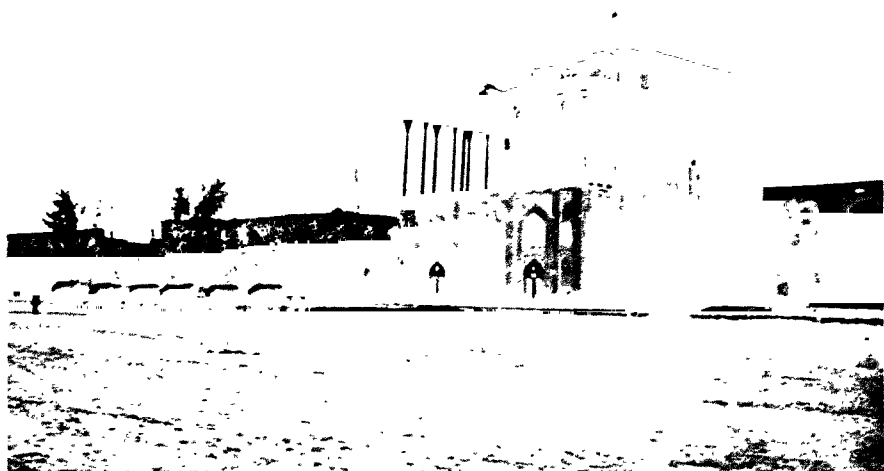
¹ So far as I know, these pictures have never been reproduced; it was therefore a great disappointment, when—after leaving Isfahān—I had my photographs developed, only to find that those of the paintings in question were complete failures.

touches it. Narrow winding stairs, frequently dark, lead from storey to storey; how splendid sovereigns in wide-spreading robes ever ascended them, I do not know. With the exception of the ceremonial portico dominating all Isfahān, the building is composed of an intricate collection of small rooms, dark recesses, and narrow passages; nothing could be less like what the word palace suggests to Europeans. It was of course only a small part of a vast agglomeration of royal buildings; nevertheless the contrast between the splendid scale of all public appearances of the monarch and the exiguity of his domestic surroundings, is as striking here as in all Oriental countries. In the open room or great recess behind the *tālār*, two faded but very beautiful frescoes of women, in the best style of Persian art, still remain. In the Isfahān of to-day, no Persian ever looks at them, or lifts one finger to adjourn their speedy destruction; whereas in any European capital they would command large prices and arouse enthusiasm. The lover of Persian art who ventures into Persia, cannot believe that he is really journeying through the country that once produced the work he reveres, for no signs of it are left; when he does chance upon such examples as these, scaling off the walls among heaps of refuse, he almost regrets having seen their degradation.

Every step through this building, once a marvel, is to-day painful. The rooms are, for the most part, curiously vaulted; in some there are ceilings



The Maidān-i-Shāh, with the Shāh's Mosque, Isfahān
From a Photograph by E. Bristow, Esq.



The 'Alī Qāpū, Isfahān
From a Photograph by E. Bristow, Esq.



The Maidán-i-Shāh, with the Entrance to the Bazars from the ' Ali Qāpū, Isfahān



The Lutf Allah Mosque, Maidán-i-Shāh, Isfahān

elaborately painted; in others walls and vaults are covered with a most extraordinary decoration—a series of pigeon-holes six or eight inches deep, and of varying forms, closed by sheets of plaster as thin as cardboard, pierced with a single opening, generally shaped like a long-necked bottle. Many rooms—particularly the smallest—are covered with elaborate ornamentation, made by drawing complicated designs on plaster, then cutting away the background, and painting with a hundred colours the slightly raised figures thus left. Birds and beasts abound among formal figures, the whole composing a rich and fanciful decoration. Everywhere are faint vestiges or damaged fragments—half covered with plaster—of beautiful paintings, exposed to wind, dust, and the dung of birds; for the windows are either entirely open, or closed by the shattered remnants of pierced wooden screens. Not long since, the authorities proposed that the ‘Alī Qāpū should be used to lodge members of the *gendarmerie*, and its doors were sold in Ṭihrān; yet this defiled building must in its prime have been a masterpiece of fantastic architecture, a fairy dwelling fit for artistically ultra-refined monarchs. In its present condition, to visit it is shocking, since it can only be described by the word sordid that is here almost an obsession; anger and disgust are the emotions experienced, for vandalism—not time—has made of this masterwork a filthy wreck.

From the Maidān-i-Shāh I stroll through the

bazars, mile after mile. They are bustling and picturesque, although the brown tone predominant in light, buildings, and even clothes, detracts somewhat from the effect. Some of the men wear that lovely shade of light but vivid green, which is one of the few enchanting sights in Persia; while from time to time a claret-coloured robe passes by. Here in Isfahān turbans are numerous, as well as the universal high bonnet—like the mitre of a magus—that still retains a vague suggestion of the hieratic, altogether out of keeping with the shabby wearers. These turbans, twisted about skull-caps, are white and tightly wound on the heads of merchants, but are more voluminous and of green or dark blue when worn by *sayyids*. The prevailing hue in the bazars is none the less dun; most of the robes are camel-colour, the walls are dusty brown—in places black with smoke, the earth is brown, and the light subdued; consequently there is no contrast. But the bustle and the glimpses into shops or down arched passages into caravanserai-courts, strewn with bales or filled with camels around a water-tank, make the place picturesque. A mule or a horse, occasionally a camel, pushes its way through the crowd of pedestrians, amid loud cries of *khabardār* (look out!) from its rider. A chain festooned across a door, indicates a mosque, of whose forbidden precincts the foreigner can in passing see one corner. The fruit vendors deck their stalls with strips of Turkey-red; their neat piles of ruddy pomegran-

ates, golden oranges, and green-yellow lemons, being the only things for sale which tempt the European. The mere sight of most of the sticky dirty condiments exposed in the shops, is enough to turn the stomach. Well-ordered pharmacies are frequent; generally the most conspicuous object is a case of Burroughs-Wellcome remedies, displayed in the middle of the counter, surrounded by native remedies that would probably make the hair of Messrs. Burroughs-Wellcome turn white. In many of the shops quite good Chinese jars of blue and white are filled with sugar and other wares; vendors of *most*, sherbet, stewed fruit, and similar delicacies, display their goods in variously shaped bowls of deep turquoise-blue, that—however cheap here—are a delight to the eye, and would elsewhere be prized.

Yet despite of all, these bazars are disappointing! What magic used to lurk in their name, above all in the words—the bazars of Isfahān! Is there not something stirring in the very sound? Standing here surrounded by the reality I can see them as they used to appear to me in revery:—lofty arcades and long stretches of umber shadow shot with quivering rays of warm gold sun; gorgeous stuffs, brocaded and brilliant, brought from those realms of mystery called the Orient, are exposed to view on every hand. Veiled women and slender men throng the vaulted ways, where—in shops like sanctuaries—the merchants repose cross-legged as idols sit. Probably bazars such as these

never existed outside my fancy, since sordid reality must here have been present even in the days when Shāh 'Abbās was king; nevertheless, there surely was splendid pageantry in bazars that were, at that time, the greatest mart in all the East. Those charming personages who graced the great miniatures, were once real men, not mere conceptions of an artist; they must have ridden down these aisles in garments stiff with embroidery, their jewelled aigrettes nodding and sparkling in front of fine silk turbans. Sweeping aside the part which is only imagination, what a difference between the Isfahān of Shāh 'Abbās and that before my eyes! These vaulted passages, niche-like shops, and moving throngs, are not unpicturesque; but the crowd is poverty-stricken, the clothes shabby, and the wares on sale commonplace. Looked at steadily, these bazars are much like shopping streets in any country; and of that Orient of dreams, which like a mirage always recedes the further we travel, there is not even a vestige.

These being Nawrūz holidays, when all Persia idles and dons its best clothes, the Chahār Bāgh is thronged this afternoon. In the second-storey arcades of the Madrasa men are sitting in groups cross-legged, precisely as we see them in the delicate paintings which illuminate the manuscripts of three centuries ago. Near the entrance, men are seated on platforms smoking (two of them opium) under an awning through which sun-rays



Group in the Court of the Chihil Situn, Isfahān



Wall-Painting in the 'Ali Qāpū, Isfahān



A Street in Isfahān, with View of the Shāh's
Mosque

fall on the groups, where green robes make brilliant spots of colour. An unbroken stream of pedestrians moves up and down the avenue, threaded by men on white donkeys with orange trappings. In front of a tea-house, there is a plantation of young wand-like trees, bare except for a few feathery tufts of green; in the alleys between them, men are seated on brown mats by threes or fours, just visible through the slender stems; the scene has a charm of colour and grouping worthy the delicate brush of an old-time painter.

The court of the Madrasa is full of men, who crowd about, watching us curiously and probably with disfavour; at least they do not express it, so it is curious to think that only some fifteen years ago foreigners were not allowed to sleep within the walls of Isfahān, and were obliged to reside in the Armenian suburb Julfā. Admirers of Loti will recall his vivid description of the way in which his determination to lodge inside the city, was frustrated. To-day the Isfahānī treat us courteously, whatever their feelings may be. Winding up narrow stairs, we emerge in a small room with lattice-windows, behind the arched wall cutting off the corner of the court. This arch frames a wonderful view of silver *chīnār* trunks and jewelled walls and dome, above the upturned faces of the crowd following our movements. The room is so still and has so lovely an outlook, it inspires a wish to retire here with a Persian

teacher, learn the language, read the mystics, and become annihilated in contemplation. From the roof, the courtyard filled with the wonderful colours of the men's new robes, is an enchanted picture never to be forgotten. The gay throng has brought to life yesterday's deserted spot. The silvery white of the tree-trunks seems to shine; the long narrow tank is variegated, like translucent marble, by all the reflected tints of walls, trees, clouds, and sky; opposite us the great cupola rests between its stately minars, glowing softly as though an immense blossom of turquoise and sapphire, between whose blues the contrast is like a noble chord of music. Over the entrance portal, a wooden pavilion with a pyramidal roof is picturesquely perched close to the leaning boughs of a pine. The sun is low but still brilliant; nacrous masses of slowly moving cloud diaper the sky, producing a constant play of light and shade. The blue surfaces seem lucent in this amber light, and have lost their air of decay—perhaps because the living crowd has destroyed that air of abandon, which usually reigns in the Madrasa of Shāh Ḥusayn. The whole scene is so beautiful, it will always stand out among my dreary images of Persia.

April 3rd

This being the thirteenth day of Nawrūz, is a great festival. All the bridges are thronged with

people, watching the water as it whirls past; but the finest sight is the Pūl-i-Khājū, both on account of its architecture and the greater number of people which crowd it. Unlike the long but ill-arranged bridge of 'Aliverdī Khān, this has an important central motive and well-defined terminals, forming an admirable composition. Its piers act as a dam, down which the water falls foaming through every arch, while in front of each masonry pillar, steps descend to the river level. The sun is shining, but the sky is filled with grey and white clouds, moving slowly as they fling over all things an ever-shifting chequer of light and shade; at times they even gather in sombre masses, which threaten and then disperse. The approaches to the bridge are thronged; in each of the upper arches—where the road passes—groups are seated, frequently smoking long *qalyūns*; whilst the steps and piers past which the water is roaring, are dotted with men and boys; the most picturesque sight, however, is the flat roof of the bridge, and more particularly of the central pavilion; here men and boys stroll or sit in constantly changing groups, silhouetted against the sky, with mannered outlines that would have delighted Bernini, and startle me by their resemblance to the contorted statues on the church of St. John Lateran at Rome.

Even more beautiful than the movement and grouping of the crowd, is its colour. The mass is brown, but profusely sprinkled with both the shade

of brilliant green that delights me more than anything in Persia, and a rose-purple seen for the first time at Isfahān. This colour is almost identical with the enchanting tint so frequent in old Persian miniatures; when new, it is like the flesh of pomegranates, but after the robe has been worn, turns a faded purple like that of red roses past their prime. The greens vary between clear sap-green and vivid emerald. At Nawrūz everyone puts on his best or new clothes, so everything is unusually fresh to-day. The charm of the scene lies, however, not so much in the brilliance, as in the particular nature of the colours. They do not offer that violent contrast of barbaric shades, which is so wonderful under the intolerable blaze of sun in desert countries such as inland Algeria—the most satisfying part of “the Orient” I have ever seen. Here the colouring is bright, yet clear and almost cold, with much of the transparency and liquid freshness we admire in the art of those Persian miniaturists, one of whose works might almost be thought to have come to life to-day.

A few hundred yards further down stream, there is a most unusual view. The tawny length of the many-arched bridge stretches across the turbid river, dashing in white foam down the piers, then swirling past the sandy shore. The usually neglected arcades are to-day enlivened by the bright colours and shifting groups of holiday idlers, that from a distance look like garlands and clumps of flowers decorating the old bridge. Across the



The Chihil Sitūn, Isfahān



Maurūz Holiday Crowd outside the Madrasa of Shāh Husayn, Isfahān



Holiday Crowd Watching the Foreigners; Madrasa of
Shāh Husayn, Isfahān



Isfahāni in Holiday Garb at the Bridge of 'Aliverdi Khān, Isfahān

muddy rapids, the painted walls and buff gateway of some villa are half hidden behind the delicately intense green of the first leaves. A little further down, crumbling ruins of earth—an Afghan fort I believe—stand on the bank in front of the city. Looking down the river, a tracery of slim branches just feathered with budding green offers through interstices a view of two hills, grey-blue and low, closing the prospect; between their slopes far distant snow-mountains are just visible, hardly to be distinguished from a sky there obscured by storm-clouds, whose gloom intensifies the brilliant sun in the foreground.

Riding back across the bridge, we enter the town and pass through the bazars. Although nearly deserted, they are more picturesque than heretofore, thanks to the magic with which noon-tide sun invests all objects. Sunbeams full of dancing motes, dart through every vaulting-orifice, as sharply visible as tangible shafts, strewing the dusty road with luminous squares. The uniform brown of yesterday is diversified by shifting light, in which all things have a livelier air. In the Maidān, the lapis-lazuli and turquoise of the mosque seem to glow and flash, enchanting the eye with the richness of their colours. The flag on the 'Alī Qāpū flutters gaily in the warm breezes, above the wooden *tālār* and battered walls that to-day seem less shabby. Camels stand about in groups, or stride slowly across the square in files, linked together by ropes hanging in graceful

curves, while a camel-driver directs the caravan, mounted on the foremost of his disdainful animals,—for the nose and eye of a camel express a placid contempt for all the earth, which a man's most withering glance can never equal. Watching them pass in the noon hour, it is almost possible for one moment to visualise this vast square, filled with the moving splendour it had in the days when the subjects of Shāh 'Abbās were the most glorious in all the world.

Late in the afternoon, the view from the aerial portico of the 'Alī Qāpū is very beautiful. The light is still intense, but more ambered than at mid-day, seeming not so much to illumine as to fondle all it touches. The immense Maidān lies at my feet, in that diverting perspective which comes of looking down. Directly opposite, the dome of the Luṭf Allāh Mosque breaks the long flat expanse of fawn-coloured walls, on which it rests like a fire-opal; to the right the Shāh's Mosque sparkles as though incredible mounds of sapphire were spread in the sun. Here and there a slender minar—without its terminal cage—soars above the stretches of buff wall and domed roofs, in one place interrupted by the jagged walls of the ruined fort beside the river. Budding trees show a little green on the outskirts of the city, beyond which two finny hills of rufous earth rise suddenly out of a barren plain, everywhere else stretching without a break to the distant girdle of snow-mountains. Over everything there rests

the charm of blue sky, where little clouds of a soft white float.

Most of the Isfahānī are promenading outside the city, so the square is all but empty, and the whole scene dream-like, as it lies in mellow sun-flood; but the *tālār* resounds with echoes of a dervish's voice, telling tales beside a tea-house below. His audience is smoking, seated on their heels on platforms with low railings, placed in rows along the walls and beside the conduit running round the square. The dervish stands in the shade of one of the few trees still left, dressed in a claret-coloured undergarment with an over-robe of blue; on his head is one of those high bonnets embroidered in black with inscriptions like cabbalistic signs. He recites with a dramatic and highly inflected voice, and a profusion of gesture not unworthy of an actor,—now standing on a great stone, now walking about, or again seated in a chair beside the tree-trunk. Here, before my eyes, is the living novel dear to all Oriental races, since first they had a language; doubtless the story he is telling, is some old romance, which centuries ago roused the echoes in the then splendid *tālār*, whence I am now looking out on all that time and man have left of the glory that once was Isfahān.

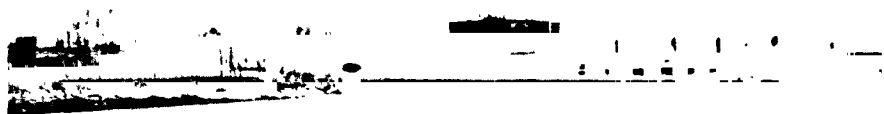
To-night there is a young moon, and from the terrace in front of my rooms, the Consulate garden seems a land of departed spirits. The *chinārs* stand out in rows of white, like ghosts of trees;

and in the net-work of slender boughs just garlanded with green, a myriad of pallid stars appears enmeshed. The crescent moon floats across a tremulous sky of sapphire.

April 4th

I have decided to travel from here to Shīrāz by mule caravan, as there are no longer any relays of post-horses on the road—thanks to the brigands who burned the carriages and carried off all the animals. An Armenian will guarantee to take me and my kit in two carriages to Shīrāz in nine days; but it is doubtful if we should ever arrive, and—should anything go wrong—my plight on a road where no other horses and no conveyances of any sort could be had, would be far worse even than it was in Khurāsān. I am also tired of the unceasing worry as to whether the carriages will upset or fall in pieces before the destination has been reached; so journeying by mule seems as though it might be a relief, despite its slowness. At first the *chār-wādār* (head muleteer) demanded twenty-five *tumāns* for each mule; but the Consulate *munshī* has finally secured a contract for seven mules and two horses to carry me and my belongings to Shīrāz in thirteen days, at eleven *tumāns*, five *qirāns* per beast. The contract states that the animals must be in good condition and have no sores, a point about which I am obdurate. The two horses—for Saïd and me to ride—are

broken down and covered with galls, so they are promptly rejected and others procured after endless disputes. When I insist on seeing the mules without any pack-saddles, the wiles employed by the muleteers to prevent my discovering sores, are remarkable. I must have looked at twenty, before finding seven with tolerably sound backs; on starting I shall have to inspect them once more to be sure that others have not been substituted. Since arriving at Isfahān, I have made the pleasant discovery that my interpreter, Ḥusayn, was discharged from the service of a member of the British Legation at Ṭihrān for theft.



The Pül-i-Khājū, Isfahān
The little specks on top of the bridge are Isfahāni, celebrating the Maurūz holidays



Old Pigeon Tower near Isfahān
From a Photograph by E. Bristow, Esq



An Isfahāni Stork with a Feeling for Decorative Effects
From a Photograph by E. Bristow, Esq.



My Lodgings at Mahyār

V

ISFAHĀN TO SHĪRĀZ

V

ISFAHĀN TO SHĪRĀZ

April 6th

ALTHOUGH I am not to leave until noon, the bustle of departure begins at an early hour, with the packing of my kit, the wrapping of luggage in gunny and water-proof cloth, and the sorting of packages into loads of equal weight. Sitting in the *loggīa* at lunch, the Consulate garden is a charming spot, with its silver-green trees outlined against a sky of blue, and spring sun flooding every corner and animating the birds, who as they flit past make the air musical. I am loath to leave this pleasant spot, which my kindly host fills with gaiety, and face once more the discomforts of the road. Those who have benefited by hospitality and pleasant company only in civilised countries, cannot appreciate their full worth; it is only realised when they are enjoyed in such remote regions as these. However, since it is not possible to linger, at mid-day I take a reluctant departure from a place that I shall not easily forget.

It has been decided, on the assurance of the Governor of Isfahān, that I shall need no guards between here and Qūmisha. His official declaration that the road is safe, permits me, if robbed, to demand indemnity from the Persian Government; as the Government has no money and owes large sums to travellers who have been robbed during the last ten or fifteen years, the value of this privilege is dubious. My caravan comprises six mules with luggage, one laden with fodder, one for my interpreter-thief, two horses—if the poor creatures may be so called—for Saïd and myself, and four muleteers on foot. The speed at which we shall travel, may be inferred from the muleteers' ability to keep up with the animals. Each mule has a small bell, and the leader a large booming one, all of which keep up a merry jingle. After riding down the devastated Chahār Bāgh and across the bridge of 'Aliverdī Khān, we wind along through hovels, ruins, and grave-stones, until the road begins to rise toward the bare russet hills that hem in the plains of Isfahān on all sides. As we ascend, the city gradually diminishes, while the yellow tone of walls and roofs scattered among the green, loses its brilliance, fading to a rosy dust-colour. The square mass of the 'Alī Qāpū still towers picturesquely over all, and the iridescent dome of the Shāh's Mosque, with its slender minars grouped about it, looms large and ablaze with blue. The half-tileless cupola of the Madrasa is also conspicuous in paler blue further

to the left, while here and there an earth-coloured minaret breaks the flat expanse of terraced roofs. In the foreground, the succession of imposing bridges is clearly visible, barring the river with long bands of golden brown. Beyond the city, far across the plain where no green seems to grow, the hills rise in pale mauve streaked with umber and grey. Snow-capped mountains of blackish purple and grey—the colour of dark grapes covered with bloom—close the panorama with their faint outlines. Before me the ground slopes upward, brown, barren, and strewn with stones, while to right and left jagged hills close in around the trail. Slowly their shoulders begin to hide Isfahān, until I catch my last sight of the dome—now pale turquoise—that from near or far arrests the wayfarer's attention.

The spot where I have just halted, must be the same from which Loti enjoyed his first view of Isfahān. The white fields of poppy that delighted him, are not in bloom to-day—if they still exist; but of things yet unchanged his beautiful description conveys a false impression. He tells how: "*cette ville bleue, cette ville de turquoise et de lapis, dans la lumière du matin, s'annonce invraisemblable et charmante autant qu'un vieux conte oriental.*" This phrase, like all of Loti's words, is a piece of pure sorcery, but is none the less inaccurate. The general effect of the city wherever viewed, is faint *greyish yellow* tinged with rose, not *blue*; this last colour being confined

to a few bits of ruin by the river, and to the two groups formed by the domes and minars of the Madrasa and the Shāh's Mosque. These cupolas dominate everything, not so much by their size, as by their brilliant blues, which are in sharp contrast with the rest of the dust-coloured city. No stretch of the imagination can make Isfahān as a whole look blue. A great deal of faience has undoubtedly fallen from the monuments, since Loti rode from the south to see the now vanished "roses of Isfahān"; but even in those days, it cannot have been true that beside the two great domes—"un peu *partout*, dans les lointains, d'autres dômes bleus se mêlent aux cimes des platanes, d'autres minarets bleus, d'autres donjons bleus." In a writer who can by sheer magic of style describe a slum so it seems a paradise, such exaggerations appear unnecessary.

From the summit where I am standing, the road descends to a new and smaller amphitheatre of hill and plain. On the further side of the plateau below me, the hills rise in russet ranges and isolated groups, terminating generally in a serrated ridge not unlike the dorsal fin of some gigantic dragon; indeed, viewed from afar, these hill-chains resemble prehistoric monsters couching on the plain in spell-bound rows. On reaching the level, stony earth gives way to a saline marsh, where water oozes forth in little pools and streams, rippling in the wind. Far away, the position of villages is indicated by pigeon-towers, with a central

turret resembling a knob, strewn over the meadowy ground like the castles on some Gargantuan chess-board. The walls of Qal'a-i-Shūr—our first stage—are now visible, although still remote, at the foot of the mountains. When caravanning in Persia, it is customary to make the first stage a short one, in order to allow for the delays in starting, not to mention the possibility of sending back for all the things muleteers have forgotten. My *chār-wādār* did not leave with us, being busied with the departure of other caravans, but is to overtake us this evening.

It is nearly five o'clock when we reach the village. The caravanserai is unusually filthy, and the courtyard filled with the stench of a horse's carcass in advanced decomposition; so I secure a lodging in what is, for Persia, rather a charming spot—on top of a high gateway, fairly clean rooms with windows on every side. I am now writing in a covered balcony directly over the gate; I look down across the road into an enclosed orchard of green young trees, its earthen walls rosy in the setting sun; further away the plain is covered—as though by snow—with a white saline deposit, that extends to the edge of a shallow expanse of water, where a flock of white birds can just be seen floating. At the foot of ribbed hills rising suddenly from the level ground, a village nestles with a brown dome, a minaret, and several pigeon-towers, standing out above the confused group of walls and trees. To the left, through the gap

where the hills sink into the plain, only to rear themselves again in the direction of those we have just crossed,—the snow-mountains beyond Isfahān draw a faintly silvered outline across a sky of opal. The sun has this minute dropped out of sight; only the farthest hills still glow as shadows creep over the marsh, and the white expanse turns greenish yellow; a flock of goats is crowding through the gateway below my balcony, with a curious huddling motion like the flow of impeded water; a little breeze sways the first leaves of the young trees, murmuring as it passes; and the tinkling sound of mule-bells is heard in the distance.

It is now night, and a crescive moon bathes everything in mystery-bringing light; the stars, brilliant but few, seem carelessly strewn across the grey-blue dusk; beyond the indistinguishable shadows of the orchard, the salt plain stretches its powdery white like frozen water or fields of snow. Were the earth everywhere the same, the effect would be less mysterious; here where the mind knows that neither snow nor ice can be, yet by night refuses the obvious explanation, the change from colourless earth to a sea of white is startling. There is no sound, save that of wind moving through road-side trees, whose bare boughs in this subdued light form a haze of grey. Ḥusayn has begun to play one of those peculiar Persian guitars that look as though cut from a tree trunk at the point where two boughs—one

larger than the other—have grown together, while still keeping their separate outlines. Its tone is thinner than that of our guitars, more like a mandolin's, but very sweet. Ḥusayn plays fairly well, and this music—now gay, now plaintive, but always graceful—is the one thing needed to perfect the night, as I sit on my balcony, looking out over the moon-enchanted landscape, feeling that Persia for the first time in some measure approaches expectation.

April 7th

The sun is brilliant, the air fresh and crisp, almost sharp. The great altitude of the vast plateau which is Persia, makes the atmosphere pure and bracing; yet, except when a sudden lack of breath after a rapid climb recalls the fact, it is difficult to remember that the barren plains and low hills one crosses so wearily, often lie higher than passes in the Alps. Out of my window the little lake of shallow water beyond the white deposits of salt is delicately blue this morning, lending the whole scene an I-know-not what that refreshes; for here in this arid land the very idea of water, above all blue water, seems a dream of more favoured worlds.

The telegraph-inspector, whom I am to accompany as far as Qūmisha, arrived last night; at the present moment his mules and mine are grouped together, undergoing the long and complicated

process of being loaded. Those who have never travelled by caravan, cannot realise the endless number of packages that have to be loaded, the length of time it takes to sort them, the difficulty of holding them in place until fastened, the number of knots to be tied and untied, or above all the quantity of forgotten articles that must be attached somehow when once the mules are laden. At last everything is ready and we start, only to halt after a few minutes to let the animals drink at a stream crossing the village street. It is impossible to know, either the full charm of clear running water, or the torment of not daring to drink it, until one travels in parched countries. A traveller with European knowledge of the sources of disease, would in such places give all the wine in the world for one pure mountain-brook, from which to take an unlimited draught. This water appears innocuous, yet a few yards away, opposite the caravanserai gates, I can see that corruption is not confined to its court; in the ditch across the road, a shaggy white dog is standing beside the putrid carcass of a horse, its paws and muzzles scarlet with carrion blood.

The track, for in all Persia there is hardly anything that could be called a real road, leads between rows of wells like giant ant-heaps, toward and through the strangely formed hills enfolding the plain we crossed yesterday. It rises gradually among the bright russet hues of these trenchant ridges, then passes through a valley—if this ver-

dure-suggesting word may be applied to the brown waste of stony earth stretching before us. After a little, the way is barred by a cliff, where a path winds upward and around the shoulder of the rock, between slaty walls in a diminutive defile wrought by torrents descending in ages past. The mules scramble up, with their loads banging against the rocky sides, and their bells jangling out a tune livelier than usual. I have long since taken to walking as a pleasanter means of progress than sitting my sorry horse, who is outstripped by all the mules, and can only be kept with the caravan when a muleteer walks behind him. Here I should never have dared trust myself to his stumbling paces.

At the summit a group of men is waiting beside a ruined house; they are *tufangchī* (road guards), stalwart fellows on foot, with guns slung across their shoulders, some of whom insist on accompanying us. Big and fierce-looking as they are, I doubt their bravery; and consider their company in these parts a nuisance, whose only object is to extort a two *qirān* piece at every change of escort. My *chār-wādār* arrived last night and has taken command, riding ahead of the caravan on the smallest donkey ever seen. He is called Ḥājī 'Abbās (the word Ḥājī being a prefix assumed by those who have made a sacred pilgrimage) for he is a much-travelled individual, who has been several times to both Mecca and Karbalā. To hear the name of the most splendid of the Ṣafawī kings—

the Grand Sophies of our ancestors—in common use for muleteers, is, however natural, amusing to a foreigner. Despite his title and his name, I rather miss the lively lad in an indigo robe, who yesterday took the *chār-wādār's* place.

The sun is now high, and the morning chill has been followed by real heat, so walking is no longer pleasant. My companion, the telegraph-inspector (who has lived for twenty-five years in Persia, the greater part of the time alone with his wife in a solitary station) entertains me with tales of adventure and attacks while travelling, that make me realise how unsettled a country Persia has always been. The plain we are crawling across, as the air wavers with heat like veils rippling in the wind, is of course a desert on which nothing grows except pale tufts of dusty straw. The surface of the ground is lacquered by a kind of crust, grey-white tinged with rose; its ashen hue is enhanced by the brown serrated hills, streaked with orange and splashed with sanguine, that surround us with masses of rock and crumbling stone, deeply graven with wavy lines. Far away to the left, where the two ranges close in around the valley, a mirage has formed; while between the sinking hills, a mountain seems to float—a tawny island on a blue-grey sea of mist. Hard at hand, the ruined walls of an abandoned village are rosy in the sun-flood. Turning sharply to the right down another gorge, then ascending a hill-shoulder, Mahyār—our halting place—comes into sight.

The sun is now flaming; far ahead the outlines of our caravan are distorted by waves of heat into what appear elongated visions rather than men and beasts. When we reach the high walls of the ochre town, Ḥusayn the inefficient is waiting with a smile to tell me he has found a lodging. We enter by a gate in a swelling tower, so narrow the mules strike their burdens against the sides, and have to be pushed through; then turn and twist between the mud-walls of a half-ruined village. We stop before a kind of vault, soot-black and unspeakably foul, which Ḥusayn assures me is the best room to be had. I insist that he can find better, and that, if not, I will sleep on the ground outside the walls; so Ḥusayn reluctantly searches the hamlet, and soon returns in triumph. Followed by muleteers and mules, bumping by most perishable possessions against every possible obstacle, we wind through the narrow streets, until we reach a filthy enclosure filled with slatterns and their half-naked brats. The rooms are almost as loathsome as the others; I am on the point of taking them in despair, when a big fellow in the wide blue trousers worn in these parts, begins to make such a disturbance I think he must object to my lodging here. My intelligent interpreter volunteers no information, but repeated questions finally extract the news that the man is telling me he knows a clean house. For the third time we wander through the lanes of Mahyār, and at last discover what seems a palace, particularly after

it has been swept. My room, like all buildings in this land without beams, is roofed by an almost Gothic vault with penetrations. The walls are full of those rectangular recesses that, in the Orient, replace furniture and cupboards; over the door there is tracery to let in light. Everything is whitewashed, with indigo lines around all the architectural forms. Over the point of each arch a conventional design, and in every niche a vase of flowers, is painted, all in primitive colours—yellow, green, vermilion, and ultramarine. On the spaces between the recesses, small mirrors are pasted in the centre of painted designs with scarlet flowers of unknown species, at which wonderful birds are gazing from below—whether cocks or nightingales I cannot tell. The flamboyant chimney-piece is painted bright gamboge. The floor is covered with rugs, and in the corners there are piles of bedding neatly wrapped in cloths. Blue and white bowls, bottles, and sherbet spoons of pierced wood, are ranged on the shelves formed by the vaulting arches, while caskets and a coffer bound with gilded tin stand in the recesses. Altogether it is a gay and surprisingly clean little place, quite habitable when once my kit is arranged.

In the vaulted shed next my room, a man is carding wool; I hear uninterruptedly the curious rhythm of his work—thump, thump, thump—then the twang of wire vibrating. He is seated on the ground cross-legged, grasping an implement

like a primitive harp with only one string, of which the shaft is as thick as a man's wrist. The left hand holds the upper half of this instrument over a heap of wool, while the right strikes the wire with a wooden pestle, causing it to descend among the wool, which it catches and flings off in small bits, submitted to this process over and over again until sufficiently fine. The women—who do not veil here, but wear gowns and head-coverings of calico, usually scarlet with white dots—are seated on the ground with their children in a circle, making a meal of some green plant looking like dandelion. One little tot toddles about in a thoroughly Persian fashion; that is to say, in a flowing robe and cloak of calico left wide open, so the whole of his brown and naked body is visible. Donkeys are standing or rolling in the courtyard; occasionally a tinkle from one of their bells makes itself heard above the wool-carder's cadence. Across the flat roofs, I can see an immense cliff overhanging the village—a sheer wall of reddish rock streaked with grey. On the top a pointed stone is perched, looking from here like a large golden falcon.

By candlelight my little room is very picturesque, with its porcelains and coppers reflecting the glow and casting soft shadows. My door frames a lovely lunar landscape—a mysterious sky of tender blue, low cupolas just catching the moon-rays, walls that are only flat black shadows, and ground of pearl-grey chequered with shade.

A diminutive donkey has just strolled up, and is standing motionless with his head inside the door, fixedly watching me. The only sounds are the pawing of donkeys' hoofs, the tinkle of a bell, the murmur of women's voices at intervals, or occasionally the cries of children and the wail of an infant. From time to time, a man or a woman walks into my room in silence, ostensibly to collect some of the belongings left behind when I dispossessed them, but really in order to inspect me—for I am always the object of much curiosity. However they are quiet and polite, so I do not rebel until the head of the family stands in front of me for nearly five minutes, looking at me steadily. The donkey's gaze I thought rather friendly, but this is too disconcerting to be endured.

April 8th

When I rise, the courtyard is already filled with women and infants—many of the mothers mere children themselves, and the wool-carder is preparing to commence work. While the mules are being loaded, always a lengthy process, I climb onto the roof, where a view of the entire village is to be had. As in all Persian towns, there are no windows in the street-walls; for the Oriental cloisters his domestic life in a manner that must be seen to be believed, and windows on a public way might offer glimpses of the interior to passers-by. The streets are bordered by blank walls,

only pierced by low doors or wide portals; which gives the hamlet an air of secrecy. When my caravan starts, the sun is just rising beside the lofty cliff towering above us. The air is fresh and the sky limpid. As we pass another village, where tree-tops nod above the roofs, the walls are radiant in the young sunlight. A line of trees appears to be on the march toward a distant group of hovels. My companion, the telegraph-inspector's animals, a string of mules my *chār-wādār* is taking down to Shīrāz with us, and my own mules are all ahead; so we form a caravan of some importance. A number of the mules have large bells that boom as they walk, making a bass to the higher tinkle of the smaller bells.

The scenery is much the same as yesterday, only more sombre. Tiny black specks moving in the distance, betray the presence of flocks grazing. Before long, the mountains close around us in an amphitheatre. From slopes of sandy earth, rocky summits emerge suddenly; in some places they look like gigantic rocks, sharp as arrows, rising out of a sea surging wildly about their bases; in others, both flanks and peaks resemble the waves of some ocean æons ago immobilised at the height of its fury. To the right—whither our road is now bending—a cleft appears in the range, through which snowy mountain-tops are visible in the far distance. At the foot of nearer hills, a group of the now familiar but always picturesque pigeon-towers indicates a

village. Films of cloud have long been gathering, until the sky is all but covered. In this funereal light the chain of rocks ravaged by cataclysms assumes a sinister aspect, with its eternally suspended waves all but barring our egress from the desolate plain. Gradually bending to the right, we come in sight of trees and walls that must be the outskirts of our halting-place, Qūmisha. Suddenly a turquoise dome appears above a gentle rise hiding the rest of the building, so that the pointed cupola seems to pierce the earth by magic—like a bulb of incredible size and colour. Qūmisha itself can now be seen in a plain between two lion-coloured spurs towering above it, as though dragons on guard.

As we approach, trees show above the walls, covered with foliage, not pallid like that of the poplar, but profuse and deep-hued, such as we see at springtide in our own northerly countries. The building whose dome appeared a few moments since in so curious a fashion, proves to be a mosque, where is buried an *imām zāda*, brother to the Imām Riḍā, who was so obliging as to distribute the members of his sanctified family over a wide extent of territory. The turquoise cupola, with its band of deep violet-blue, dominates an irregular mass of all but colourless walls, standing out like a jewelled iris against a rose-streaked cliff, that beetles behind so close as almost to touch it. In front of the mosque is a row of small pollard-willows, with twigs just tipped with green, spread-

ing out from the trunks like slender fingers. Beyond these stretches a shallow pool of water—if anything as formless may so be called—its surface a lovely robin's-egg blue, ruffled by the slow paddling across of a pair of wild ducks with rust-brown bodies and arching heads of snow-white.

The road now winds through a graveyard, which—like all I have seen in Persia—is no more than a piece of barren ground, where small piles of brick and stone are heaped in the utmost disorder. Sometimes a tiny slab bearing a short inscription, is set in the ground or placed on edge like a tombstone; generally there is only a rectangle of dust-coloured brick and a heap of rubble to mark a grave. These burial grounds recall that sinister phrase, “the potter's field”; and their neglected disarray is almost more depressing than the collection of wire-wreaths and hideous monuments which make European cemeteries so horrible. The roadside is strewn with millstones, cast there when and why—who knows? Then we begin to enter the town proper, between blind walls and half-fallen vaults; for Qūmisha, like so many of these cities and villages once populous, is to-day half in ruins. These decaying streets, where people still dwell among stretches of ruin, are melancholy and typical of the Persian, both in his decadence and his indifference. After twisting through a labyrinth of lanes, we reach the telegraph station with its three clean rooms overlooking a court, where a freshly blossomed

fruit-tree seems to reproach a larger but still budless tree.

My *chār-wādār* proposes "breaking a stage" to-morrow, that is to say doing two, so wishes to start at half-past three in the morning. As my companion is only going a single stage further, he does not care to leave so early. It is necessary to procure an escort, since the road from here to Ābāda is reputed dangerous; a scribe is therefore brought to write a letter to the governor. He is a wonderful old fellow with a beard that is flaming red, except for an inch of white around the face. He seats himself on the floor and writes with a reed pen, holding the paper—Persian fashion—on the palm of his hand. I am told that the peculiar custom of twisting the end of each line upward in Persian letters is a sign of honour; and that the more exalted the recipient, the higher the end of the line must rise. There is, however, no way of ascertaining whether this be true or not; for Persians appear singularly ignorant in regard to their own customs. Only this morning a man insisted that the abandoned but still numerous pigeon-towers were built to lead air into subterranean chambers used in summer! As a matter of fact, they were built for pigeons on a peculiar plan, arranged to facilitate gathering the manure for the fields.

The governor's reply has just been brought, saying that if I leave while it is still dark, his *suwārs* will be unable to see robbers, and cannot

guarantee my safety. This is of course a pretext, since the last time at which brigands would be on the watch, is just before daybreak; but I am obliged to yield, and, after endless palaver and the sending back and forth of messengers, agree to start at four-thirty.

April 9th

Four o'clock. The moon must still be up, since a light like liquid crystal blanches every object in the court, while the sky itself is suffused with pallid radiance. The moon set while I was dressing, for impenetrable shadow holds sway at present. Above the roofs, the now unrivalled stars glitter in heavens of the deepest blue. Ḥājī 'Abbās is squatted against the wall fast asleep, waiting for my luggage to be packed. Instead of loading at once the packages that have been ready all night, he waits until the last valise is closed. When I am prepared to start, only one mule is laden, and everyone has to be stirred up. The *tufangchī* are for a wonder waiting for me, thanks to the telegraph *ghulām* (servant) whom I sent to fetch them.

When we leave, it is after five o'clock and broad day, though the sun has not yet risen. We wind through crumbling ruins, called the streets of Qūmisha, and slowly reach the open. The great cliff of violet-brown looms over us, outlined against a luminous sky, greenish white near the horizon.

Just above this tremendous wall, two or three shred-like clouds sail past, white on the upper edges but smoke-coloured below, like those in the skies Claude loved to paint. Indeed the whole scene, with its combination of lucency and masses of unlighted brown, recalls pictures in which the Lorrain contrasts the light of a setting sun with expanses of brown or grey shade. Everything is still unilluminated here where we are moving under the far-flung shadow of the hill-cliffs; but across the plain, where sun-rays have already struck, the hills are flushing rose, as they seemingly spring into life. However often seen, nothing is lovelier and more mysterious than the phenomena which attend the appearance of a new day. That the withdrawal of the sun makes no change in the essence of things, is difficult to believe; since when first we see them again, in the lustreless light before sun-beams have touched them, they appear lifeless or at best asleep. The next moment, when the first shafts of sun have fallen on them, they seem to leap into a form of real life, like disenchanted sleepers in old tales. A moment ago every object was as plainly visible as at present; yet everything was dull and cold. Bathed in sun, every object now seems living, while the colours that a moment since were flat, quiver and glow. This lovely effect is very fleeting, and has already begun to subside, when the sun swings into sight above the hill-top.

The plateau—bounded on three sides by lines

of hills, unbroken except where Qūmisha lies in a cleft—is less barren than heretofore, being streaked with pale green and dotted with villages. Over their walls and scattered trees, the pigeon-towers stand out; many of them quite large buildings with crenellations and a small turret in the centre of the crowning platform—rather like models of the Castello S. Angelo. Clouds gather until the entire sky is obscured; even when the sun shines through a rift, the light is ghostly. A sharp wind is blowing and the cold unpleasant, a reminder of the height at which the Iranian plateaus lie. The country has now grown absolutely desolate, with a pall of uniform grey stretching over it, whilst wild gusts of wind buffet man and beast in a manner very trying to nerves. On either hand unlovely hills hem in the narrow upland as far as sight can reach. Overhead a sky of lead; in front a drab and desert plain; dreariness wherever the wearied eye may turn; not a living thing in sight; no change to divert the mind, nothing but—

“Miles, and miles, and miles of desolation!

Leagues on leagues on leagues without a change.”

Anything so depressing I have never experienced. This featureless scene lacks even the grandeur of that “Land of Fear and Thirst” —the Sahara,—or the horror of more blasted landscapes. In its oppression, the mind turns on itself in a steadily

recurrent chain of painful thoughts, as a mill-stone might revolve without grist to grind.

Having managed to get a little ahead of my caravan, I stop to drink a hurried cup of tea and bolt a hard-boiled egg; then hasten on again at a mule's pace. Crawling along through scenery that knows no change, my thoughts move with the metallic click of machinery steadily returning to the same point. A green shrub, or a small and all but colourless flower growing under dried grass, is an event; any diversion, a relief. When I can bear sitting motionless on an uncomfortable saddle no longer, I walk until my legs ache. Ever the same eternal dreariness before my eyes; time weighs on me like a mountain of lead; minutes seem hours, and hours days.

Amīnābād is now visible, but far off—at least an hour's crawl. A few black specks develop into three pedestrians and a man riding on a donkey that would not reach his waist. They stop to talk with my escort; then Ḥusayn comes up and tells me they have said that robbers were seen this morning on the road between Amīnābād and the tower a few miles further on, where the first post of *gendarmes* is stationed; that there are only three *tufangchī* at Amīnābād, so it would be imprudent for me to attempt to reach Yazdikhāst this evening; and that I ought, therefore, to spend the night at the village, and send for *gendarmes* to escort me in the morning. This story strikes me as nonsense; but, Amīnābād being a noted haunt

of brigands, situated close to the boundary of the province of Fārs, where the Consul at Shīrāz reported trouble,—it is none the less disquieting. After holding a council of war with Saïd, I decide that it is best to push on; since the *gendarmes* would never come to Amīnābād, as they would then be outside their province, and staying the night in the village would only give the villagers time to notify the robbers—if there are any—of my presence.

At Amīnābād I tell Ḥājī ‘Abbās that we shall proceed; he is in a blue funk lest his mules be stolen; no amount of explaining that I am no more anxious to be robbed than he is to lose his animals, and am going to push on for his sake as much as my own, is of any use; I have, therefore, to resort to Persian methods, and shake him soundly until he realises that I am master. Then the *tufangchī* crowd around, trying to dissuade me; the translation of my sarcastic enquiries, whether they are afraid of the brigands or not, finally puts some life into the oldest of the seven, and the only one who shows a semblance of manhood. Taking out the Governor of Qūmisha’s order, I insist that the four men who have come the last stage, shall accompany me as well as the three new ones; to this they finally consent, after much excitement and a request for extra tips. Ḥājī ‘Abbās now says we must start on the instant, if we are to proceed; but I maintain that I will have ten minutes in which to swallow a bit of food;

after gulping it as fast as possible, we leave about three o'clock.

The ground now rises and falls in gentle undulations, concealing the rest of the plain. The seven road-guards keep running to the top of a crest, scanning the distance—one of them with a pocket telescope,—then trotting off to the next eminence; while Saïd and I watch every direction, our revolvers ready for use. The old man is marching down the road by himself, far ahead of the caravan, carrying his gun on his shoulder with quite a martial swing. Journeying in this fashion is a welcome change, since it is rather exciting; but I cannot free my mind from a suspicion that the whole alarm has been contrived by my escort in order to obtain large gratuities. I may be unfair to them, but a few weeks in countries such as this annihilate all belief in disinterested motives.¹

Before long we reach the *gendarmerie* tower, where I dismiss the *tufangchī* with the tips promised—though probably not deserved. For once they appear pleased, and have enough politeness to thank me, the old man with especially good grace. The *gendarmes* come out, salute, and—with the exception of two left on guard—start to accompany my caravan. They are not like the

¹ Within a fortnight, however, a man claiming to be an American subject, was robbed, on this part of the road, of merchandise, whose value *he* estimated—in his telegram to the authorities—at eight thousand *tumāns*.

smartly uniformed fellows in the neighbourhood of Tīhrān, differing from the road-guards only in their more honest faces, and the brass badges with the Lion and the Rising Sun fastened in front of their high bonnets. Like all the men since Isfahān, they are taller and better built than the inhabitants of North Persia. Several are wearing the big trousers so distinctive of this part of the country. Of dark blue linen, they are made so wide as to flop about the ankles like divided skirts. Their high bonnets and long robes—almost reaching the knees and held in place by a twisted girdle—give the men, however shabby, an almost Assyrian silhouette. As they walk, the outer garment blows back, discovering a cotton under-robe flowered with delightfully archaic patterns.

The road now runs down the plain in a straight line, flanked by telegraph-poles. As the sun descends, everything turns dark brown; overhead the shroud of grey has broken into separate masses, between which sunbeams occasionally slip. Ahead of me, two of the *gendarmes* prostrate themselves with their foreheads on the earth, while they recite the evening prayer; then a muleteer rushes to the roadside, rubs head and hands with earth—there being no water for the ceremonial ablutions,—and kneels in the direction of Mecca, which in this case chances to be that of the sinking sun. In the distance a very poor old man and two women, journeying alone and on

foot through this deserted country, are seated at rest beside the road; when we pass, the man begs me to have his little bundle carried on one of my mules, then hobbles after us as best he can.

After rounding a monticule, a yellow line in the far distance indicates the situation of Yazdikhāst, the fantastic city completely surrounded by chasms. Having been warned of its deceptive aspect when seen from afar, it is no surprise to have it appear level with the plain, and not towering above it. Suddenly a shaft of sun-light leaps through the river clouds, touches a clay-built dome, turning it brilliant ochre, then fades away. Before long the sun sets, leaving the hills and plain a deep golden brown. To the right an empurpled cloud overhangs the jagged hill-tops, its edges glowing with dull crimson; to the left a moon, nearly full and already high, is clearly visible in a sky of dull violet barred with grey films of cloud. From every direction, flocks of sheep and goats are moving through the brown light toward the city gates, in lines of brown and black undulating across the brown plain like immense caterpillars.

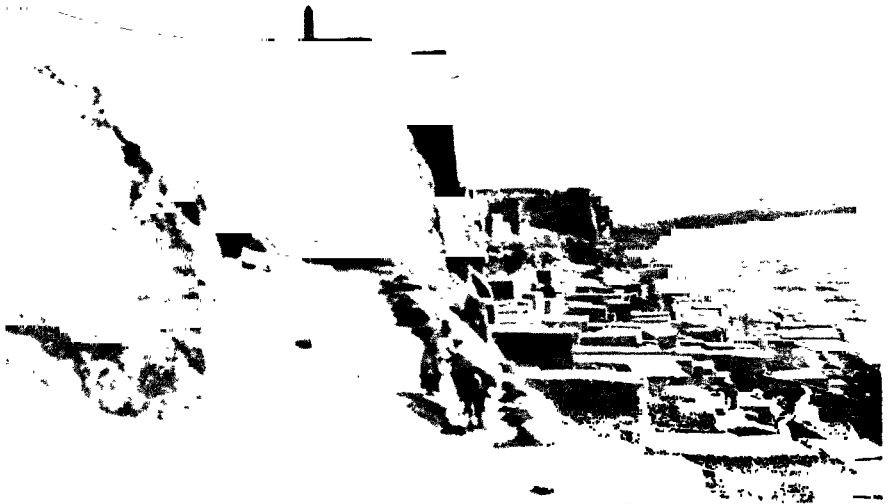
As we draw nearer, the vague outlines of the city gradually take shape. It is now close at hand, yet there is no sign of cliff or chasm. We are traversing a graveyard, that is—by way of exception—quite neat. As we pass, two *gendarmes* take a handful of pebbles from a depression in one of the tombstones, and hold them while saying a prayer for the deceased. The dried-clay buildings



A Typical Persian: My Landlord at Mahyār



A City of the Apocalypse Yazdikhāst



Early Morning at Yazdikhāst from my Lodgings



Natives of Yazdikhāst with the Hlad Tufangchi in the Centre

of Yazdikhāst are at present only a few hundred yards distant, yet still appear to be built on the plain we are crossing. Suddenly the road swings nearer, disclosing the real situation of the town, separated from us by a wide and very deep ravine. In times unknown, a great river must have worn a vast canyon, several hundred feet deep and over a quarter of a mile wide, through the friable ground, leaving an island of more resistant earth near one of the banks. The top of this curious formation is therefore on a level with the surrounding country,—hence that appearance of the town, which from a distance is so surprising to travellers familiar with photographs of Yazdikhāst perched high in the air. Near at hand the precipices are visible, rising from the river-bed far below—every inch of the space they bound, covered with houses, the inextricable confusion of whose walls, windows, and balconies, overhangs the cliffs of clay. The town being built of the same earth as its base, has the same colour; so to distinguish the line where the work of nature ends and that of man begins, is almost impossible.

The fantastic pile of city and cliff is thrown into sharp relief, and seems to shine in the swiftly waning light, all its surfaces a peculiar shade of luminous grey, as though the dust-coloured walls had been covered with a transparent glaze of very pale acidulous green. The broad floor of the chasm is sown with grass, now a dull expanse of metallic green with mauve reflections. Turning

sharply to the left, we reach the piece of open ground between the new and the old town; the latter being only accessible by a narrow bridge across the here much narrowed gorge. No railings protect the flimsy wooden structure, over which a herd of goats is hurrying to push its way through the narrow gate. It is after seven o'clock when I dismount; we have been fourteen hours on the road, practically without a halt—a terrible stage for men and a worse for mules.

After several unsuccessful attempts to find a lodging, I am led to the further end of the new town, through streets crowded with flocks, jostling and undulating like the waves of an umber sea—to a house which the village chief reserves for his guests. Crossing an enclosure strewn with stones, I find myself in a porch almost on the edge of the cliff. The scene that greets me is indeed fantastic. Directly opposite, the moon's stately orb rides the sky, although daylight has not yet disappeared. In front of me the stony earth for a few hundred yards falls steeply away, then stops abruptly. Far below, the canyon-floor spreads out, with its narrow stream rushing through a chequer of untilled earth and sharply contrasted fields of green. Beyond that, towers the side of the gorge—a sheer wall of black shadow, above which a dull blue line of pointed hills is visible. Despite still lingering day, the moonlight dazzles.

The lodgings are of the sorriest; only one room is habitable, and that has mud-walls and a ceiling

of which one half has already fallen, while the other threatens to crush anyone foolhardy enough to pass the night here. Since travellers in Persia resemble beggars, inasmuch as they have no choice, make the best of it, I must. No meat and almost no provisions of any sort are to be had; this, combined with the filthy resting-place at the end of so harassing a day, proves almost too much even for Said's good humour. My dinner and the manner of serving it, are better left without description; but the wonderful sight before me drives away all thoughts of discomfort.

It is now full night; in the abyss below I can only distinguish a confused diaper of lighter and darker blacks, beyond which a wall of intense shadow rises to where a chain of mountains less vigorously black is outlined—apparently on the same plane—against a sky of darkest ultramarine. Rising slowly toward the zenith, the enronoured moon now reigns in undisputed radiance, casting sheet after sheet of cold and glittering light down in the void which yawns below my feet.

April 10th

A flood of sun. The whole canyon, with its fresh fields and silvery streams, lies in the soft glow of earliest day; and the cliffs now show the curved surface that centuries of flowing water have hollowed, until the upper edge to-day overhangs the base. Walking to the verge, over which

my lodgings all but slide, I can see the walls of the old city towering above the gorge, while, nearer by, the houses of the new town descend to the bottom on gentler slopes, in rows of clay-built roofs one below the other. When I go out to take photographs, a curious but politely silent crowd dogs my steps. Crossing the bridge to the old city, the narrow span without any protection on either side, makes me giddy since I can see the depths below. Through the archway, there are glimpses of a narrow street between high walls, soon turning into a tunnel where the houses are built across it; but there is no time to go further. Clambering along the pebbly slopes opposite the city in the direction from which we came yesterday, I finally obtain a new view as curious as a man could wish.

Yazdikhāst rides in this vast chasm quite close to one of the sides, like an unimaginable galley stranded at the recession of some long-forgotten flood. At the prow this ship of rock is so narrow as to seem fragile; then it sweeps backwards with long cliffs now draped in shadow, above which is piled the confusion of the houses. The road that my caravan is to follow, passes around this end of the town, then winds up the opposite precipice. The river is spanned by a bridge, curving across it with a rose-grey series of brick arches. At the further end stands a neglected caravanserai, over whose gates somebody has scrawled "Cadbury's Pure Cocoa" in white letters, that would make

Loti snarl with rage. As we climb upward, the chasm on the further side of Yazdikhāst is hidden, and the town seems built on the edge of the plain, its long line of roofs and houses overhanging the base of the cliff in a giddy fashion.

When we reach the table-land, this city of the Apocalypse soon disappears, as the eternal plains stretch before us between monotonous chains of umber hills. This never-ending upland of dusty grey tinged with green is indeed—

“A land that is lonelier than ruin. . . .

Waste endless and boundless and flowerless . . .

Where earth lies exhausted.”

Creeping drearily across it day after day, seems a penitential rite full of distress and dolour. At first ample clouds were herding on the hill-crest; then a chill wind began to drive them across the sky, until now it is hidden behind serried rows of sombre cumuli. There is not a living thing in sight except my caravan and the escort—seven men on foot and three on horseback. Not a blighted tree, not even a shrub on which to rest the eye. Suddenly two crows and then a swallow wing past; when lost to sight their absence grows painful. The very hills lour, drawing together until they seem to bar the valley ahead of us. Above them, a horrid range of dull black mountains, streaked with white where the snow lies in wrinkles, stretches out its monstrous length like

a slimy python. As the hills close in, I feel entrapped:—

“Grey plain all round;
Nothing but plain to the horizon’s bound.
I might go on; nought else remained to do.

So, on I went. I think I never saw
Such starved ignoble nature.”

If only I had a real horse, I could gallop ahead and change my thoughts by rapid motion: but the poor jade I am riding, cannot even keep up with the mules, unless my heels beat an unceasing tattoo on his lank sides, or a muleteer walks behind, chirruping and slapping the wretched animal in a way that is unendurable. To break the monotony I have told Ḥusayn to take his guitar, which he is now playing—its strumming all but drowned by the chime of mule-bells. He has just broken into the *matchiche* with Persian amplifications; the incongruity of hearing this vulgar tune in so remote a desert, is amusing. Then he strikes into an old Persian air, whose silver tinkle transforms my ennui into a gentle melancholy.

Shūlgistān, the end of our stage, is now within sight. Crowds are streaming out of the gates, and advancing toward us. It seems they expect the arrival of a fellow townsman, returning in sanctity from a pilgrimage to Mecca. On discovering that it is not he, they turn back in disappointment, the green, mauve, and pomegranate robes of the men among the women’s black mantles,



Shulgistan at Sunrise



My Caravan Leaving Shulgistan



The Way Hāji Abbūs, my Chār wādār, Preferred to Ride



An Abandoned Garden. The Pavilion at Sarmak

making a picture against the ochre walls. When I alight, they crowd about me in striking groups. Outside the town, the small turquoise dome of a rude mosque rests on the dried-clay walls, like a jewelled and inverted bowl. Through a narrow gate, and between the blind walls of narrow streets, where women and children squat in the filth of corners, I am led to the house of the village chief, where two—for Persia—possible rooms are to be had. An old woman is set to sweep them, raising clouds of dust with the small besom that is the only broom known in this country. When my kit is being arranged, women sit on the roofs in huddled rows like penguins, while men and boys lean against the courtyard walls—all watching every movement I make. To anyone afraid of publicity, I recommend as training a short trip in Persia.

Neither eggs nor milk—and of course no meat—are to be had, robbers having looted the town a short time ago. The inhabitants—I am told—intend to abandon the place, as the inroads of brigands are frequent, and their taxes remain high even when they have been despoiled. While I make what takes the place of a meal, a half-starved greyhound, with a tattered blanket tied round him, slinks in and watches me reproachfully until fed.

April 11th

During the night, I was roused several times by the noisy attempts of a particularly lively cat

to get through the cracks in my ill-fastened door. No amount of shooing and shouting could drive it permanently away; it kept crawling between the rotten boards, and then bounding around the room in a manner that filled me with sympathy for the old monks, whose cells often received nocturnal visits from acrobatic devils. At last I had to rise and barricade the door with a kit-bag. I have grown quite accustomed to having people wander into my room at all times, to the incursions of dogs, hens, and ordinary cats, even to the presence of a donkey's head swaying its long ears in the doorway; but a fiend in the form of a cat leaping loudly around the room in the dead of night, is still somewhat disconcerting.

When dressed, I take my elusive way on foot through the tangle of lanes, and out of the gate in the walls with which every Persian village is fortified; leaving the caravan to follow as soon as ready. A pool of water has formed in front of the little mosque—or is it a tomb? In the delicate light of early day, the varied blues of the rough tiles covering the cup-like dome, glitter above me and shine reflected in the water at my feet. Donkeys amble past in twos and threes, followed by men and boys on their way to labour; then a comical flock of tiny brown kids trots by in charge of a woman wrapped in her veil. The town is quite picturesque, with its crenellated walls, its ruined pavilion over the gates, and its

groups of small flat domes on every side—all of them built of sun-dried earth.

Loti always refers to these walls of earth—the only building material used in Persia except in great monuments—as being “*gris-rose*”; to my eye their colour is a shade of brown. It is too warm to call even “rose-grey,” since grey is always cold. When wet or in shadow, the walls are pale burnt-siena tinged with rose-madder; in sunlight they are like the neck-feathers of a turtle-dove. Only when seen in the far distance could they possibly be called grey; even then, they are to me dust-coloured—that is to say, the faintest possible shade of yellow. At all times the rosy tinge is prominent and very charming.

While I am sitting on a bank, trying to note the exact colour of Persian walls, my caravan files through the gates. To-day the sky is without a cloud, pure cobalt fading to blue-grey where it touches the mountains. The same plain of endless brown, the same hills of sepia. The dun vista is closed by mountains slanting across the plain; even they are unlovely, in form commonplace, in colour a dark dirty grey, streaked with livid white where snow lies in the folds. Everywhere dreariness to the eye, and weariness to the spirit. Hājī ‘Abbās, my *chār-wādār*, owns a diminutive donkey, which he rides most of the time with his legs tucked under him, and a small oil lamp stuck in front of the saddle. A *ghulām* returning to the bank at Shīrāz, has joined the caravan; he also

bestrides a white donkey so small his rider's feet almost touch the ground. One of the muleteers has withered arms, hanging from his shoulders like the flappers of a turtle. The caravan of merchandise that Ḥājī 'Abbās is convoying to Shīrāz, generally takes the road with mine; which is pleasant, since to watch the large number of animals is diverting and the tinkling of the bells, dominated by the lead-horse's booming note, the only cheerful sound all day long.

In my pocket there is a copy of Loti's *Vers Ispahan*, which I have not re-read entirely since it first appeared. As we jog along, I take it out from time to time, and read a page or two, shading the leaf with my note-book. I am divided between anger and admiration. How romantic he makes this detestable country seem! It is true that he warns travellers they must sleep: "entassés dans une niche de terre battue, parmi les mouches et la vermine"; and says frankly that "qui veut venir avec moi voir la saison des roses à Ispahan, . . . se résigne à beaucoup de jours passés dans les solitudes, dans la monotonie et les mirages." But the very sound of his enchanted words makes the prospect so delightful, no one can possibly conceive the reality. Sorcery of precisely this nature, no other writer possesses; he is able to travel through the dreariest and most disappointing of all celebrated countries, and make it seem a land of wonders. His inimitable powers of expression lend colour to the commonest objects,

whilst the ear is ravished by the cadence of his jewelled phrases. To read such works is a delight; but when the truth stares one in the face, revulsion is intense. Loti's book makes hodiernal Persia all the sadder, and travel here the drearier; for—even when allowance has been made for the part which imagination plays in his writing—it shows how much has been lost in the comparatively short time elapsed since he made his journey. Then the cities, although ruinous, retained some traces of splendour; and of the ancient customs and costumes, there were still survivals. The last vestiges have now vanished from a land that has lost its distinction without gaining true civilisation. Persia is to-day only a grinning skeleton decked in the tatters of its glory and galvanised into a semblance of life. Travelling here is like a visit to that little museum in Paris, where a glass case holds the mummy of Thais of Alexandria;—faded robes, bare bones, and a few tarnished strands of blond hair clinging to a horrible skull. Ghastly relics such as these hinder, instead of helping us to visualise the vanished beauty. The names Isfahān and Shāh 'Abbās evoke a vision of greatness such as my eyes shall never see; but when I pace the solitary Maidān-i-Shāh or move across these weary deserts, all the glory that once was Persia, is hidden by what lies before me.

From these distressful reflections I am aroused by the sight of trees magnified by the mirage-like

vibrations of the air. It is Ābāda, where there is a telegraph-station with clean rooms—an oasis, here as eagerly sought as any I have seen in the Sahara. On entering the town, the earthen walls are so rosy one expects to see through their breaches something other than abandoned orchards; but the leafless poplar-trees—like fine besoms of silver green—and the fruit-trees on which leaves and blossoms mingle, delight a desert-weary eye. Finally the telegraph-station is reached; and through a gateway of bright yellow clay with white trimmings, crowned with ibex horns, I enter a yellow courtyard neatly kept and well planted, off which there is a white and comfortable room with tables, chairs, and other luxuries. Like all travellers on this road, I bless the British management of the Indo-European Telegraph Department. This pleasant and well-kept resting place is made particularly agreeable by the courtesy of the telegraph operator, and the receipt of a telegram from my compatriot, Colonel B. asking me to stay with him on arriving at Shīrāz. Provisions are plentiful but unpleasant, since at Ābāda almost the entire population is said to suffer from syphilis.

April 12th

Cats in Persia must certainly be possessed of devils, for their craft is more than feline. The first news to greet me this morning, is that a cat

has stolen the chicken cooked to carry with me for lunch! I should never have thought it possible to dislike any animal, but a certain hostility toward cats—at least toward Persian pussies—begins to possess me, particularly as they are not, according to anticipation, long-haired and handsome. The sun is shining brightly in the trim court of the telegraph-station, with its walls of yellow clay so brilliant it might be pure ochre. A few plants of gilly-flower and iris are in bloom already. Everything in sight testifies to the operator's care; and as I look out between the print curtains—real curtains!—of my clean white-washed room, it is all so neat and restful, I can scarcely bear to think of what awaits me on the road.

This morning the scenery is not so dreary as of late. To the right the hills merge in the plain at a spot beyond which the snow mountains rise abruptly without intermediate ranges. To the left are barren hills and snowy peaks. From both sides the mountains curve toward each other, diminishing the while, until they meet behind a hill with two summits like a camel's back. A veil of misty blue hides the distance. The land is partially cultivated, strewn here and there with patches of varying green. Small fortified villages are frequent; riding between their high walls of clay, over which the tree-tops are just visible, makes a break in the monotony, and hastens the passage of slow-footed hours. In other countries

this would seem but a sorry landscape; here it is interesting.

The phenomenon that I have observed every morning, is now taking place. On starting, not a cloud is to be seen, or at most a few shreds of white drifting across the mountain-tops. Then about ten or eleven o'clock, they begin to float into sight, banking up on the rocky peaks; whence they move insensibly across the sky, until it is covered with an all but unbroken mass of grey-white. At the present moment, they are flocking across the hills, in groups of shining white, dappling the ground with shadow.

To-day's stage is very short, and almost before I realise it to be possible, Surmak comes into sight; the ground has grown barren once more, changing from brown to ashes of roses with stony patches of palest lilac. Ahead of us the clouds have dropped long banners of rainy vapour, trailing half-way down the mountain flanks. Ruined walls, roofless but pierced by arches, attest the fact that we are approaching the village; otherwise it would be difficult to judge the distance, since the air quivers with heat as though the finest of silver gauzes were waving between us and Surmak. To the left among green fields of grain, a great mound of earth stands out, sculptured by wind and the waters of the rain—doubtless once a citadel built for security against robber nomads. Donkeys cross our path from every direction, bearing enormous burdens of what is here used

for fire-wood—a low withered shrub plucked with all its roots—which makes a short bright blaze and exhales a pleasantly aromatic odour. The loads are so huge, they hide all of the donkey but the head and legs; indeed, at a distance they seem to move by themselves on four small legs. The donkeys are—like ourselves—making for the gates, through the ruins that precede and often constitute the larger part of all Persian villages. These expanses of waste land and fallen dwellings add to the sadness of travel here; since they produce on arrival an impression of entering, not an abode of the living, but a ruin where homeless wanderers have sought refuge.

While Said and Ḥusayn go in search of lodgings, my caravan halts in front of a narrow gate, through which the donkeys and their loads have to be skilfully pushed. Carrion always strews the ground around these villages, for to death and decay all Orientals seem indifferent. Here the bloated carcass of a dog is lying on its back among the boulders, with rigid legs standing out above the enormous putrefaction of its belly. The inhabitants flock out to see that curious animal, a European—the walls soon being lined with silent but eager spectators, some of whom gather in knots about my mules. Before long my emissaries return to tell me all the rooms are quite impossible; they are, however, accompanied by a youth who says he can show us the way to a decent place. As he has a Sun and Lion badge on his bonnet,

he must be some sort of a *gendarme*; his long robe, once wine-coloured, is now faded to a beautiful shade of amethyst. As he walks ahead of us, with his wide trousers flapping about his heels like a skirt, his amethystine garment and the rose-coloured walls of clay make a subtle harmony no painter would disdain.

Poplars rise above the walls, slender shafts apparently of polished jade, that would lend poetry to any scene. Far away I can see the brown sharp hills, the louring clouds, and the plain flecked with shadow, rising slightly like a sea of indescribable hue—neither brown, nor grey, nor green, nor blue, but a faded mixture of all. Our way twists through narrow streets imprisoned between high walls of clay, over which the blossomy boughs of fruit-trees hang. Several women pass with uncovered faces, but shrouded in long veils of black or dark blue, held tightly around the head, whence they float down and outward to the ground. With their heads modelled by these mantles, and everything but their faces concealed, they look like tragic madonnas strangely out of place in Persian villages. We must still be outside the town proper, since we keep skirting a lofty and bastioned wall, that is very picturesque with its jagged crenellations and crumbled surfaces.

After many windings, I dismount before a narrow gate in the midst of high walls. On entering, I stop short with surprise—for I find myself

in a Persian garden, once a prince's plaything, now an abandoned but charming ruin. In the centre stands a small pavilion, built—it is true—of dried clay, but neatly and with narrow pilasters; on each side three arcades closed by doors give access to a room, flanked on either side by the entrance to a vaulted passage. A trellis carrying vines not yet in leaf, surrounds the building. Needless to state, every door is open, and the whole place falling into decay. Still it is clean, and in the midst of that enchanting thing, a walled garden, which, though neglected, is still filled with young fruit-trees, curving their long twigs under the white or rosy weight of blossoms.

In front of my room, at the foot of a low terrace, is a little stream that fills the air with the murmur of moving water, as it flows into the garden under an arch in one wall and out of another on the opposite side. It is bordered by two rows of stately poplars, but this being Persia, all the finest ones have just been felled, and are now lying in a tangle on the ground; some already stripped of their bark look like bars of golden ivory; those untouched are a pale silvery green, so polished they seem of marble. It is a sorrowful sight, but so is almost everything in Persia. A high wall of golden earth closes the view; above which I can see the purple-brown flanks of a barren hill against a sky, where one white cloud is almost crushed beneath a bank of threatening grey. The note of a bird comes fluting from time to time; the wind sighs through

swaying poplar-tops; and always there is the liquid music of the brook rippling up to my ears.

The village chief has just sent a *gendarme* to express his regrets that a broken leg prevents his visiting me; and to bring me a tray with a plate of pistache nuts, a bottle of wine, and an enamelled cup in which wet cotton holds in place a beautiful bunch of purple iris; he has also sent two guards to sleep outside the house to-night. In their sense of hospitality and courtesy, the Persians of to-day still show a refinement worthy of their past.

Sunset from the terraced roof of the pavilion. On all hands a jumble of high walls, now brown, from among which trees rise in profusion; a kind I do not know, spreads its bare boughs very far in an olive haze of just budding leaves; below them are abundant blossoms and foliage, where fruit-trees grow, and here and there poplars pointing skyward. Beyond this, the brown walls and loftier towers of the fortress-village; above them a group of the slenderest poplars, still without leaves, swaying like ghosts in the breezes. Beyond the umber town, but so near as apparently to touch it, are the equally umber mountains, mantled with snow and canopied by clouds. Looking westward, the sun has just sunk behind deep blue hills, between sombre piles of bluish cloud, whose blazing edges frame luminous expanses of green-gold sky. Eastward, long films

of grey are flushed with rose. Spring casting a semblance of life and grace over a crumbling town as day fades; what an epitome of this hope-for-saken land!

Night-time. The moon is up, but hidden by clouds, through which only the dimmest of lights can pass. The felled poplar-trees, prostrate in a net-work beside the brook or among the still standing trunks, gleam like blanching bones. Words cannot render the ghostly effect of this pallid coppice outlined against a livid sky, where a few stars peer through rifts in the clouds. The rippling cadence of the stream and the whirring sound of a tree-toad or nightjar, echo through the silence. It must have been among such desolate groves as this, that the souls in Virgil—

*“ibant obscuri sola sub nocte per umbram
perque domos Ditis vacuas et inania regna.”*

April 13th

Last night, for the fourth time, I suffered from the malice of Persian cats. Saïd had gone out after placing a chicken for to-day's luncheon on a high chimney-ledge, and—as he thought—completely barring all means of ingress. However, a wily puss managed to crawl through a broken pane of glass, and jump some six feet onto the shelf, where she knocked over a lighted candle, setting fire to a precious package of tea, and burn-

ing the handle of my revolver. She was about to depart with the cold chicken, when I heard a clatter and rushed in, just in time to save the food and extinguish the fire. Cats really do exaggerate in Persia!

The voices of the two *gendarmes* on guard outside, waked me at dawn; the first sound I heard was a nightingale's song, as liquid and as fluent as the melody of running water that floats up from the hidden brook. Now the sun is just beginning to shine over the high walls, touching with gold one side of the pavilion, where the coral-tipped blossoms shine in the first fresh light. The fallen poplars seem to cling like suppliants about the shafts of those still standing; alas! before many days have passed, they too will ring with the blows of axes, waver, and then crash to earth. The next traveller to enter this ancient garden, will only find a bare wreck without grace or green.

After we have wound out of the tortuous streets, the plain shelves upward like a great beach, with pointed hills emerging suddenly as the summits of long submerged mountains might do. Beyond this slope, we find the same eternal waste that has for days followed us like scenes in a nightmare; only, here it has been narrowed by converging hills. I now know what must be the sensations of those unfortunate adventurers who, in fairy-tales, journey until exhausted, only to find themselves back at their point of departure. I

begin to wonder if I shall ever escape from this blighted country; and the days that must elapse before I can take ship, seem countless. Slowly we move upward through the steadily contracting gorge, where a line of telegraph-poles makes the unchanging desert uglier still. Blackish clouds gather and then let fall a sharp patter of rain. A few monticules of rock dot the plain as though hurled there by some angered giant. The hardby snow-mountains soon diminish to a low and unlovely ridge—almost black like a snake's skin—on which the snow lies in streaks, as though some viscous liquid had been dropped on the summits and left to trickle down the ugly sides. The ground is now broken by vast undulations that we are forced to climb and then descend, one after the other.

At last we reach our destination, Khān-i-Khora. Ḥusayn says this means the Horrible Place; if so, it is well named. There is no village, just a caravanserai; here I have a small room begrimed with smoke, looking out on a filthy court where straw and dried manure are whirling in the wind. There is no door to close the room, and the doorway between it and the next cell has only been half bricked up, leaving a large hole through which I can see the miserable inhabitants, and hear them talk, cough, spit, and smoke their bubbling *qalyūns*. The supply of water comes from a pool or shallow well in front of the caravanserai; it is enclosed, but with large arches through which

all the flying filth can be blown into the water. Within a radius of fifty yards there are: the local *lieux d'aisance*; the skeleton of a camel not yet entirely bare; and the body of a dead horse in advanced putrefaction. Not daring to use this contaminated liquid even after boiling, I set out in search of a spring said to exist. At the foot of the hills, I find a well-mouth; down this a man clammers; then a jug is lowered, and matches and dried branches thrown down. Smoke soon curls out of the well, and after a long interval, a voice rises from the earth. A jug of fairly clean water is now hauled up, with Aliaga—as his name sounds to me—climbing breathless up the perpendicular sides after it. Even pure water is hard to find here. All these material discomforts would be negligible, were there beautiful views or curious sights to see; but Persia offers so little compensation, it is difficult not to long for other countries.

Across the road is a neglected orchard, enclosed by half-fallen walls of clay with an abandoned dwelling at one corner. Here and there an untended tree has put forth a few blossoms, pearly white or tipped with rose; birds are fluttering in the bare boughs, and three donkeys are playfully biting and kicking each other. A gentle breeze sways the weedy grass, and two sable crows wing across the plain outside, cawing hoarsely. Stretched on a sloping trunk, I hear the mule-bells chime, as the weary animals come to drink, and then file through a gap in the walls to crop

the scanty grass. The sound of their munching, as they scatter under the trees, is audible above the tinkling of their bells. In front of me stands a dwarfed fruit-tree, its few gnarly boughs hung with delicate garlands of white flowers. To my waste-weary eyes they give the same pleasure that must have been felt by those artists, who in Japan so loved to draw a single feathery spray outlined against a bar of clouds.

April 14th

All night the noise of my neighbours came through the broken walls from the next room, where—to judge by the sounds—men, women, and children of all ages, must have been piled promiscuously together. By five o'clock even the semblance of sleep had fled. Horrid sounds, smoke, and evil smells, poured into my dirty cell through the hole in the wall, whilst I was dressing with all possible haste. It is a relief to find myself once more out of doors, looking on something tolerably clean, even though it be no more attractive than the desert upland. The sun has just risen, and the lustreless ghost of a moon is sinking toward the snow-spangled crests. The snake-coloured mountains of last night are now tawny and less unlovely; in fact the arid scene has a certain charm in this clear early light.

It is almost seven o'clock when the mules are ready to start. I have refused an escort of *tu-*

fangchī, as they are now an unnecessary expense and nuisance. We have only gone a few hundred yards, when I hear shouts and see an old man rushing toward me, his footgear and hat in his hands, and his long white hair streaming in the wind. He runs up to me, quite out of breath, shouting something of which I can only understand the word *tufangchī*. While talking, he puts on his linen shoes, and places on the back of his head an extremely high bonnet with a cabballistic device in brass. He stoops as he walks beside my horse, with his hand on the small of his back, breathing loud and painfully—the image of a distressed magician in a fairy tale. When Ḥusayn comes up, I discover that he is an employee of the Telegraph Department, and the owner of the ravaged orchard which last evening delighted me. He says the *tufangchī* have been making his life miserable, and have this minute cut off his indispensable supply of water; insisting that he dare not remain here any longer, he begs my permission to accompany us to Dihbid. He has an honest face, and arouses pity as he pants and hobbles along; so after giving him some bread and tea, I have him mounted on a mule.

It transpires that he has lived at Khān-i-Khora for twenty years, and was—in the days of post-travel on this road—the prosperous owner of the horses here and at the neighbouring stages. All his horses were stolen by robbers, who also sacked his orchard and carried off his flocks a few years

ago. Unattractive though Persia be, it is impossible not to be deeply moved by the suffering and abject misery that stare the travellers in the face at every turn. Strangled by the Great Powers (one of them a champion of liberty, in this case forced to violate all her best traditions) and plundered within by brigands and corrupt officials, this is to-day the most *hopeless* country I have ever seen. The words Ḥusayn used a few days since, haunt me yet: "Ah! Monsieur, la Perse est bien dans la misère aujourd'hui."

Our road winds up a steep grade, between sandy hillocks covered with grey tufts of dried grass. Here and there gullies are filled by a fuzzy growth of violet-grey shrubs; but in general only yellow earth and clumps of windlestraw greet the eye, as we toil steadily up the twisting path. So unexpectedly as to startle, a cuckoo's note rings out through the silent air from the tawny crest of a hill, and is answered by the call of its mate. The birds are far above me, out of sight, and their music seems to descend like the aerial chime of invisible bells. In a flash, this familiar cry has evoked the forests of the Ile-de-France at the height of spring. The barren uplands have vanished, and I find myself riding through ferny glades among boles of birch-trees, under the shade of their far-spread boughs. The ground is strewn with timid sprays of lily-of-the-valley, or half hidden by the concourse of yellow jonquils

nodding in the sun—like golden butterflies hovering over a carpet of russet leaves. The air is filled with the sound of pealing bells, as through the green gloom cuckoos call from bough to bough. Then the vision is gone, and I find myself back on the hills of Persia, seized by that nostalgia which recollections of the loveliest corner of the world always provoke.

The ascent is now very steep, and the rounded hillocks have closed in, sloping upward directly above us. In places they are covered with grey thorn-bushes, leafless but with flowers so minute, they are only distinguishable where they cluster in a haze of pale mauve. By the road-side clumps of an humble flower rather like a moth are frequent, its small leaves lilac-grey outside, but within, yellow at the heart and at the tip. Around a bend in the road, I come suddenly upon four scarlet tulips growing in a stretch of yellow earth—like drops of blood on a lion's fell. Then other clusters appear among the weeds and under thorn-bushes. Here in this desolate fawn-coloured gorge, the sight of these vermilion blossoms is as startling as a sudden trumpet call. One of the muleteers has just gathered a handful of the gaudy cups (with black hearts outlined with yellow) standing erect between long pendent leaves, and brought them to me with a pleasant smile; so my hands are filled with gay flowers as I climb the hill. The cuckoos have long been left behind; but little birds constantly flit across the road or

glide down among the tufts of grass, filling the air with a melodious twitter. The sight of fluttering birds and of flowers robed like flames, recalls the forgotten fact that even on these upland wastes:

“ . . . Aprille with his shoures sote
The droughte of Marche hath perced to the rote.”

We have now almost reached the summit, toward which we have so long been climbing. White piles of snow still lie in shaded nooks. The muleteers frolic with it, one even gathering a large lump which he carries on his head. Finally at a height of some eight thousand feet above the sea, we emerge on a vast plateau bounded by naked hills, beyond which there is to westward a loftier range thickly strewn with snow. Riding along, the air is clear and invigorating, as befits one of the shoulders of the world. Before long we encounter a band of *tufangchī* sent from Dihbīd to meet me—for the telegraph-operators kindly send word from station to station when travellers are passing. Then a few minutes later a second group appears, this time on horseback. They line up to salute, then fall in; so I ride along with my caravan in the midst of a small army.

Black clouds are now gathering from every quarter, while from behind, an inky sheet of rain rushes across the sky toward us. To the left high pointed peaks striped with snow rise sud-

denly, sweeping forward across the horizon; and great undulations cut the plain with a series of long hills up which we mount and descend, as though gliding down waves. Suddenly there is a long declivity, at the foot of which Dihbid lies before us;—a group of trees and hovels in the centre of a great plain hemmed in by high mountains now hung with storm-clouds, striping the earth with alternate bands of shadow and pale grey light. It is a dreary view, yet, in its desolate way, impressive; a place where the Horse Whose Rider Is Death might choose to pass in the roaring of this gale. Gradually we draw nearer—my armed horsemen galloping around me as I ride ahead of the caravan—and soon reach a few half-ruined huts of dried mud. Goats are standing on the roof, and two gipsy-like women are seated on a terrace, where a piece of scarlet cotton spread on a rock, stands out violently in this ominous gloom. This hamlet has, like so many others, been pillaged and wrecked by robbers in recent years. The telegraph station is situated within an enclosure that could easily be defended against attack. The operator is in this case an Englishman of education and wide experience, who receives me with a cordial hospitality that I shall not forget, even though I shall probably never have an opportunity to show my appreciation of it. To find volumes of Wilde, Emerson, and Shakespeare in this Persian solitude seems fantastic.

April 15th

From Dihbīd the road ascends, then once more crosses the endless plains, whose dun monotony seems almost more than nerves can bear. After several hours there is a slight but welcome change in the landscape. We now travel over a series of vast undulations, tinged with orange and separated one from the other by marshy levels, where short grass grows in water and salt deposits form white streaks. Then we climb a steep hill strewn with boulders, and descend the opposite slope through a serpentine gorge. The hillsides look as if covered with iron refuse and rust. The hills gradually close in, until they overhang us in shaly masses of orange-brown pierced by jagged rocks. Bushes, not unlike the gorse but with white blossoms tinged with pink at the heart, grow in crevices. The scene is scarcely pretty, but arouses expectation at each bend, which is delightful after days in the desert. After leaving the gorge and crossing uplands intersected by brooks, Qādirābād comes into sight below a stony ridge. It is as usual surrounded by rectangular walls, with bastions at the corners and in the centre of each side. The high gateway is crowned with curved ibex horns, in these parts a frequent decoration.

A possible lodging is only to be had with much difficulty; on a roof two dirty rooms separated by a terrace, under which women are weaving carpets. A part of my kit is carried up the narrow stairs by a man who has been travelling with my

caravan all day. I discover him crouched on the ground, searching my saddle-bags; so he has to be driven out by a shower of kicks, and orders given that he is not to be allowed to travel with us again. The air is heavy with the acrid smell of all Persian villages, and is filled with the noise of women fighting over their children like squealing furies. The descending sun touches the walls opposite me with rose, poplar-tops bow in the breeze, and birds twitter in the golden light; but the shrieking voices, filth, and evil odours, are what most impress my weary senses.

April 16th

There is a certain excitement in starting this morning, for to-day's journey takes us past the spot where once Pasargadae stood. When we leave about six o'clock, there is perfect pandemonium outside the gates, where the chief of the *tufangchī* and most of the villagers are grouped. They gather round, insisting that I ought to take the usual caravan route; but no consideration of comfort or safety shall cause me to pass the Tomb of Cyrus by, unvisited. Finally we start across country, led by a mounted *suzār*. The ground, no longer barren, is covered with men tilling the fields with primitive wooden ploughs—moving slowly across the plain behind their oxen, with that picturesque air which the Persian's high bonnet always lends him at a distance. Our

path is constantly cut by streams and water conduits, through which we splash and scramble. On the bank of a sizable brook, we come upon three wonderful birds of the species known in Algeria as *le chasseur d'Afrique*. They are large and of pale but vividly green plumage, with russet shoulders and wings tipped with black. They are wheeling above a sandy hill, screaming like jays. In Persia so small an incident as this stands out in the day's journey.

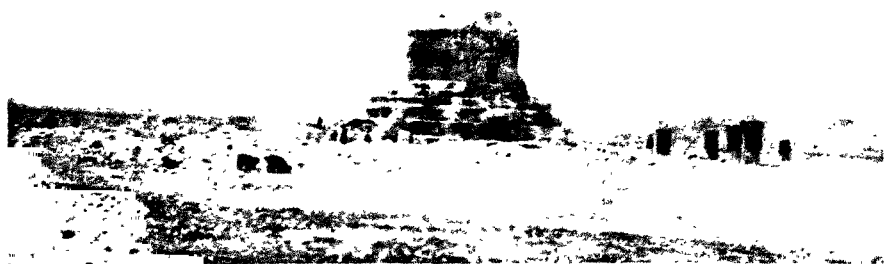
After several hours spent in crossing hills, we reach the village of Dih-i-Nuḥ, now in ruins, and abandoned on account of robber raids. A few hundred yards further on, after passing the hill-crest, a yellow foundation wall crossing an eminence suddenly appears on our left. It was once an audience-hall of the Achæmenian kings, but is now known as the Takht-i-Sulaimān—the Throne of Solomon. For the names of the Achæmenians, even of Cyrus the Great, are unknown to those who dwell in the lands where once they ruled; whereas the fabulous fame of Solomon has stirred popular imagination to a point where it attributes to him all vestiges of splendour. After stumbling over boulders and thorns, among which small red flowers grow, I reach the platform which is all that remains of the palace, and find the whole plain of Murghāb spread before me. In front, a meadow of soft brown, yellow, and green—like faded tapestry—extends to the hill-ranges. The gap left between the two chains, is closed by a

peak just tipped with snow. Below me to the left are scattered ruins, supposedly those of Pasargadæ, the first capital of the Persian Empire, founded—it is said—by Cyrus the Great on the spot where he overthrew his grandfather, Astyages, King of Media. Even of ruins but little remains: a yellow piece of wall, a monolith, a platform with a column, a block of stone, and further off at the foot of the hills close to a caravanserai, the Tomb of Cyrus—a small stone building, like the Ark of the Covenant, resting on a flight of steps beside a barren tree. A vast meadow strewn with a few bits of wrought stone, and one or two mud villages, where more than twenty centuries ago there stood the city of the most splendid sovereigns of the antique world.

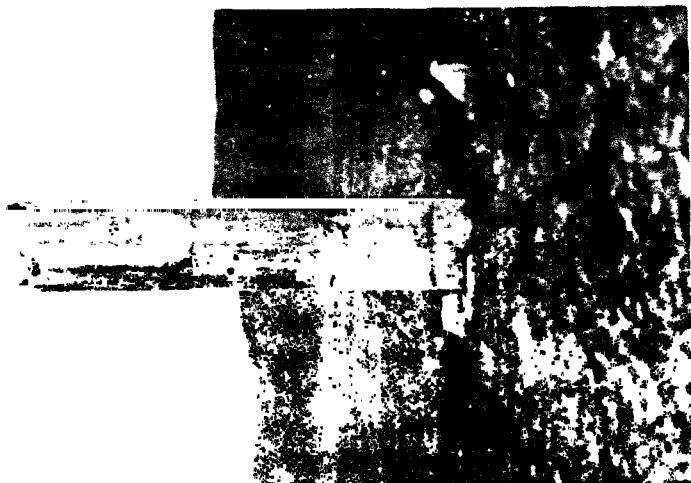
Resting here, it is impossible not to wonder what manner of men looked out on these same hills two thousand years ago. Doubtless, according to our standards, barbarians in many ways; but at least the royal beings who paced these walls, must have possessed a hieratic grandeur, a majesty quasi-divine, so long lost we moderns can scarcely conceive it. In material ways they were probably less fortunate than modern artisans; but in things spiritual, it is perhaps not altogether fanciful to think them endowed with an esoteric experience no longer known. With what eyes did they gaze between these hill-set pillars; above all, what thoughts flitted through their minds as their feet trod the once polished but now ruined stones on



The Tomb of Cyrus the Great, Pasargadae



Goats and Children Guard the Tomb that Alexander of Macedon Entered with Reverence



Ruins of Pasargadae
 "Ivan Cyrus the King, the Achæmenian"



The Ruins of Pasargadae
 Winged Effigy supposed to be that of Cyrus the Great

which I stand to-day? Wherein were they like and wherein did they differ from us? Oh! for one flash of illumination, whereby to divine the mentality of a Cyrus! Idle thoughts, but like all vain things not unalluring. . . .

Standing by itself on the plain, a square shaft of yellowed marble some six yards high, rises from the sandy ground and stubbly grass. On its face are three lines of arrow-like characters—cuneiform inscriptions that I cannot read. Yet this abandoned piece of stone wreckage bathed in sunlight, thrills me; for those little dashes that I am looking at, here in the fields of Murghāb, form the famous tri-lingual phrase: "I am Cyrus the King the Achæmenian," whose proud simplicity stirred me even when, a small boy, I first read it in school-books. The ruins of the royal palace are not particularly interesting, but the nearby block of stone, with its winged figure carved in low relief, is extremely so. Somewhat to my surprise, I find it deeply impressive. Does it represent a divinity or a king? or is it really—as supposed—an image of Cyrus the Great? The idea that it may be his portrait is stirring, yet does not really matter, since the bas-relief is in itself very noble, even when half-effaced, covered with lichen, and at this hour in shadow. These archaic artists by their symbolism, spiritual fervour, and enforced simplicity, attained a hieratic beauty no modern work—however fine—can achieve. This figure expresses the remoteness of majesty or divinity

with wonderful success; even its mannerism and deliberate distortion of perspective seem, not so much a defect, as a chosen form of art.

A gallop of a few seconds brings me to the Tomb of Cyrus. There is mockery in the fact that it is now known as the Tomb of the Mother of Solomon, and is surrounded by the graves of Muslims. This group of stones was—we know—visited by the world-shaking Alexander of Macedon; and of what he saw the account of an eye-witness has been preserved in a later chronicle:—

“Aristobulus says that there was in Persia, in the royal paradise, the tomb of that Cyrus. About it had been planted a grove of all kinds, and it was watered with streams, and deep grass had grown up in the meadow. . . . In the house was placed a golden coffin where the body of Cyrus was buried, and a couch beside the coffin. The feet of the couch were of hammer-beaten gold, and it had a cover of Babylonian tapestries and thick carpets of purple were strewn beneath it, and there was also upon it a tunic and other garments of Babylonian workmanship. . . . And in the middle of the couch was placed the coffin which held the body of Cyrus.”

Of the columns once surrounding the tomb, a few fragments still remain. The building is very small and without ornament. The steps on which it is placed, are built of huge blocks, so high that to clamber up them is all a tall man can do. Ruin and nature have now made the sepulchre

their own; plants grow in fissures, bushes crown the steps, and from the roof a small tree rises like a banner. Goats and kids sport at its base, whilst half-naked children play on the steps that the Macedonian mounted with awe; from the burial chamber which he must have entered with reverence, a village slattern rushes out as I step in. The door is open to animals and all the winds; inside there is nothing but a cell begrimed with smoke, where strings of bells are hung across the end, and prayer-papers lie in hollows scooped in the floor.

In this exiguous space Alexander bowed his conquering head; here even the vandal who burned Persepolis, revered the founder of a race to whose glory he had made an end; the body of Cyrus and all its trappings have long disappeared—who knows whither?—now neglect and ruin reign. Could the Great King for one moment return, it would be impossible for him to comprehend what has happened. That his imperial tomb should be desecrated and overgrown with thorns, while goats graze the grass where his stately city once stood,—he could scarcely conceive; and he would find small consolation in the fact that when century after century had fallen into the abyss of time, men should still come to visit the stone that once held the wax-embalmed body of Cyrus the Achæmenian. It is true that even now travellers are thrilled, when they see the burial-place of the King of Kings, who once filled all the world with

the rumour of his fame; but to-day is it more than a wind-borne echo? Of Kay Khusraw, who dried the Euphrates and marched up the river-bed at night to take great Babylon by stratagem in the midst of her pride, what is left but a vaulting name and, in text-books, a few lines to stir a school-boy?—Once again “vanity of vanity” in all its platitude; yet in spots like this it returns with such a poignancy as makes it seem a discovery.

Riding slowly off, I look over my shoulders to take the last glance I shall probably ever have at the stones that must have met the gaze of Alexander when he entered the plain of Murghāb. The road now enters a cleft in the hills, curving through the Tang-i-Bulāghī. The rocks rise above us on both sides in sheer walls; sometimes the path is actually cut in the face of the cliff, and is so narrow only one mule can pass at a time. At the bottom a muddy stream dashes between the high perpendicular banks it has cut through the loam in past ages. It no longer fills its bed; feathery plumes of sedge wave beside the water, then olive-green willows with fine foliage grow up to the banks, above which their tops hardly rise. Where the hills are less abrupt, shrub-like trees grow in such regular rows they seem planted by men. The air is murmurous with the swish of running water, the twitter of birds, and the croaking chorus of frogs. The scenery is not particularly beautiful; yet after days spent in the desert, this wild gorge—where the twisting

road at each turn affords new vistas—seems a small Eden.

Beyond this defile the road crosses meadowlands, and then enters a broad valley that might be in the Alps, were it not for camels grazing, while their drivers lie on the grass beside the bales. Outside a village, we pass a walled garden filled with trees covered with vivid green foliage. Large trees in full leaf! their real beauty can only be appreciated in countries where they are rare. Then the valley contracts, becomes wilder, and turns sharply to the left. Ahead of us is quite a river; a large bridge once spanned it, but is now in ruin, so the only passage is across a ford. This stream is often so swift and deep as to be impassable. Fortunately it is only knee-high to-day, but the animals, in fording, slip and flounder from stone to stone; so the crossing is not without excitement.

To the left, the angle where the valley changes direction, is formed by a bare and sloping hill. Near the summit a shoulder of rock emerges suddenly, in the semblance of a grotesque human face with upturned snout—such as Goya loved to picture in his *Caprices*. When we have crossed the river and turned this vast buttress, it towers beside the road—a square mass of tawny rock. Innumerable crows wheel round its apex and dash into the crevices, cawing wildly, quite as though it were the ruins of some rough-hewn cathedral tower. In a wide depression—once the river-

bed—is a grove of trees, mainly poplars, fledged with fresh green that caresses the eye. Through this coppice the narrow stream now winds; on the further side a cliff rears its swelling bastion of purple-brown, and then sinks toward the plain in long curving bands of vertical flutes. The fast-sinking sun fills the air with a gentle radiance, melancholy like all departing things. Before long Sivand appears at the end of the grove; the sun is about to set when we reach the telegraph-station, which stands outside the village—looking like a royal villa.

Sitting on the porch, the valley spreads before me in the twilight, until the mountains abruptly fence it in. From the gardens in the grove beside the river, men and women are wending across the meadows toward the tiny brown houses that constitute the village. The men carry spades over their shoulders, and wear those high bonnets that always recall the Kings come from the East; the women walk in separate groups—grave figures with mantles falling from the head until they trail on the ground. In the evening light the scene is pastoral, a quality more than rare in this country. . . . When night draws her veil hung with stars, the chorus of frogs is loud enough to deafen. Their croaking sounds as though it were the noise of some object revolving and grinding at one point in each revolution; yet it has a rhythm not without fascination, as I listen to it vibrating through the dark.

April 17th

Just as my caravan is starting, a curious noise attracts attention—a procession of women moving along the path at the foot of the declivity in front of the telegraph-station, chanting a lamentation. Ḥusayn tells me it is the funeral of the chief villager's wife. At this point the road begins to pass between the banks of a slight depression; the body is already out of sight, and of the foremost women I can see little more than the head and shoulders. The women walk two by two with uncovered faces, but shrouded in the veils which form the main part of every woman's dress, whether rich or poor. Even little girls begin to wear them at the age of seven or eight years, so nothing could be more common; yet there is real dignity in the sweep of these ample draperies. Therefore, to Western eyes which associate this quality only with classical or tragic compositions, they suggest images of grief. In fact, they do resemble the madonnas and mourners of our pictures; and I personally never see a group of them (half standing, half kneeling) without being reminded of the women gathered at the foot of the cross in the Crucifixion which Tintoretto painted to fill Venice with its splendour.

To-day the sorrowful association of these mantles is apposite as their wearers file past, for the most part draped in black—not because it is mourning, but because it is the commonest colour. The women now seat themselves in a

little hollow near a wall beside the stream; they are grouped about the to me invisible body, in tiers ascending the acclivity. Their lamentation is uninterrupted but is not as might be expected a shrill wail; it is a low ceaseless murmur like the sound of birds in distress. The men—all in brown robes—are seated hardby in a line against an umber wall of clay, in their black bonnets looking like a row of magi. Occasionally they break into a chant, whose louder tones dominate the moaning of the women. It is a curious scene that I leave behind, as we move through the village out into the valley in the early April morning.

To-day it is possible to view the monotonous road without displeasure, since it leads me toward the tombs of the Achæmenians at Naqsh-i-Rustam. I have hired a villager to show me the shortest way, and after two hours' journeying leave my caravan to proceed to Kināra by the direct road, while Ḥusayn, Saïd, and I, cross the river after our guide, who tucks his robes up in his girdle, precisely as the royal hunters "girded up their loins" centuries ago. The path skirts a high barren hill, straight across which Naqsh-i-Rustam lies; but to reach it we must ride round the hill. When we come to the promontory in which it terminates, we find ourselves in a wide plain bordered on each side by low chains of rocky mountains devoid of all vegetation. In the far distance this valley opens out into a vast plain where fortified villages are just discernible.

Unlike the country through which we have travelled so many weary days, this is meadow-land, tilled in places, in others covered with weeds and grass. In spots some white flowering plant waves over the grass, where wild poppies dye the corners of the fields with scarlet. Like all cultivated ground in Persia, this valley is intersected in every direction by irrigation canals—deep narrow trenches where muddy water flows swiftly at the bottom. On the steep banks little shrubs grow among masses of poppy, waving their vermilion cups as the wind runs over the slender stalks. On the right, the barren mountain rises abruptly in long spurs we are forced to skirt, since the canals make it impossible to ride across country. Great white clouds have long been driving across the sky, and have now gathered in ominous groups above the mountains which bound the horizon far across the plain of Mervdasht. Beside the road there is a nomad camp: black tents around which women move in figured cottons of the most brilliant red. A few girls are scattered over the plain, standing in the grass or kneeling on the yellow earth beside the trenches, in their gaudy clothes looking like a larger size of poppies.

My guide said that to the tombs it was only a "little *farsakh*" from where we left the main road, but we have travelled at least two already. Just when I am beginning to lose patience, I see the top of a square tower-like building on a mound in front of the cliff; it must be the "fire-temple"

built in front of the tombs. At present everything that is not covered with vegetation, seems tinged with rosy pink—bare earth, water-dykes, stony roadside, and lofty mountain. The perpendicular cliffs tower above us, like the discrowned battlements of some fortress once built by Titans; huge fragments strew the ground at their base, and their red-brown surfaces are seamed and dented, as though they had withstood the onslaught of Jove's artillery. Turning a last spur the tombs lie before me.

At this point the cliff which terminates the lowest range of mountains, begins to sink rapidly until lost in the plain a few hundred yards to the left—like a reef running into the sea. The rocky wall here swells out in a series of vast bastions; indeed the whole formation has a strange resemblance to the work of gigantic yet human beings. High above the ground on the more level surfaces between the sheer projections, two intersecting rectangles—one vertical, the other horizontal—have been cut so as to form a vast but unequal cross. The horizontal arm is narrower and more deeply sunk than the vertical. The door to the tomb is a small aperture, like a black spot, in the centre of the cross. Four of these immense designs stand before me; the first one, on the side of the spar we have just rounded, being almost at right angles to the others. A sandy ridge some thirty or more feet high runs parallel with the cliff, affording a splendid view of the tombs from

its summit. The contrast between the smoothness of the deeply sunken surfaces and the rugged face of the rock, is very striking; and the vast yet simple conception of these royal tombs is deeply impressive. Cut in a mountain side high in the air, truly these are sepulchres befitting great kings. Their bodies were not hidden away in earth, there to become the loathsome prey of corruption; but were embalmed in wax and precious unguents, and then placed on high; so that even in death these imperial monarchs throned it aloft, gazing out with sealed eyes across the plains that had once been in life the scene of their splendour.

And what was it they ordered to be depicted on the smoothed surfaces of their last resting-place, high on the beetling cliff, for men to gaze up at during untold centuries? In low relief, columns with capitals of bulls' bodies, support an entablature; above which a row of men—representing subject races—is carved, carrying a platform with another row of captives; these uphold a second platform; on this the King is shown in profile standing on a mound, with his right arm raised in adoration before the symbol of Ahūramazda—the upper half of a majestic figure rising from the emblem of eternity between wings floating in space. The scene is noble, and even to-day that curious symbol of Divinity all but arouses awe. On every tomb, the same figures: high on the polished stone, just beneath the deep overhang of the crags, the King alone with God.

These ancient peoples, whose simpler natures looked on the world with fresher eyes, had in truth a peculiar sense of the Divine, that we have utterly lost. The large Sasanian bas-reliefs carved on the face of the cliffs some seven centuries later, are curious and—in the case of Shāpūr and the captive Emperor Valerian—not inexpressive; yet they fail to impress as do the great sunken surfaces above. The colossal figures are perhaps more realistic than the earlier and more conventionalised work; but they are barbaric, and lack the sincerity and stiff grace of primitive sculpture, without attaining beauty of form. Hewn haphazard in the rock near the ground, they have no plan, form no part of a composition, and are artistically altogether inferior to the Achæmenian carvings. The real inferiority is, however, mental; I feel that the men who created these bulky kings and captives, were spiritually barbarians compared with those who had that conventional but significant vision of a king and his God, which draws my eyes upward.

I am determined not to leave without visiting the tomb of Darius Hystaspes—no easy task, since the entrance lies more than a hundred feet above the ground, and the surfaces of the hewn rock are sheer and smooth. However, villagers or nomads—I know not which—are standing about prepared for the advent of a curious foreigner, and ready to haul me up with ropes. After tucking up the skirts of their robes, by some



The Cliff-Hewn Tombs of the Achæmenian Kings, Nagsh-i-Rustam
The four sunken crosses are tombs; the fifth is hidden



The First Tomb, Nagsh-i-Rustam



The Tomb of Darius Hystaspes, Nagsh-i-Rustam
The bas-reliefs below the tombs are Sāsānian work



Sāsānian Sculptures, Nagsh-i-Rustam
To the left, Shāhpūr receiving the conquered Roman Emperor, Valerian

feat of fly-like agility they manage to climb the perpendicular rock with bare feet and hands. Two stand on the lower platform, two on the upper at the level of the entrance; they then drop ropes which are tied under my arms, and pull me up to the first platform. Here another set of ropes is attached, and up I go a second time. Hanging in space, banging against the rocks like a ball, I am vividly reminded of the fate which here overtook the aged parents of Darius. Desirous of viewing the tomb on its completion, they were drawn up by magi stationed on the summit of the cliff; frightened—legend says—by a serpent, they let go the ropes, and the poor old people were dashed to death. Swaying on a rope, the idea that after all these centuries my end would have an august precedent, does not make the prospect more alluring. However, I am dragged up safely and hauled over the edge by the hands of my very dirty magi; then I crawl dizzily along a narrow ledge and enter the tomb by a small door once closed by slabs of stone.

I find myself in a narrow but lofty cell, in plan a rectangle with the longer side parallel to the cliff; out of this three deep recesses open, all of them, with receptacles for bodies—rude sarcophagi cut in the solid rock. The lids are cracked or lost, and everything is covered with dirt and the dung of birds. Yet this defiled chamber, whence I gaze out over the wide plain far below, once held the body of the King of Kings; and here

his favourite eunuch passed seven years of faithful sorrow beside the royal dead. These sweating walls and filthy floors must once have been hidden behind costly stuffs, and the whole tomb filled with gold and objects of price piled about the embalmed majesty of Darius. Now it is empty, visited only by villagers or a particularly curious foreigner! "Dust and ashes" once again; the thought pursues one in this country, like that iteration of a single note which maddens musicians when growing deaf.

After reaching the ground in safety, I visit the detached tower which stands in front of the cliffs. Some archæologists think it a tomb, others a fire-temple; none can prove their theory, so there is choice for all. To-day it is full of natives, eating and smoking long *qalyūns*, quite unconscious of all the disputes waged about their shelter. Turning the point where the rock loses itself in the plain, I come upon the two famous fire-altars—with a start of surprise. I had expected them to be much larger and placed higher up; as a matter of fact, they are small and quite close to the ground. Nevertheless, these rough-hewn and almost prehistoric altars, where the sacred fire once leaped toward the pellucid Iranian sky, are—as relics of a lost civilisation—strangely impressive. Not far across the plain rises an isolated mountain of curious form, on whose flat upper surface the Divinity might easily be conceived as descending centuries and centuries ago. The priest of Zara-

thustra must, as he tended the consecrated flame, have looked out—perhaps at dawn—over the gathered heads of worshippers toward this very mountain-top; the thought is stirring, as I stand here beside these long abandoned altars, the last vestiges of a forgotten but noble form of adoration.

Despite previous and present enquiries, I am quite unable to discover how the different ruins are located on the plain of Mervdasht. All the information to be extracted from my guide through Ḥusayn the useless, is that Naqsh-i-Rajab and its Sasanian sculptures are situated on the hillside across the plain. The distance in a straight line is short; but the dykes and streams intersecting the plain on all sides, force us to make a long detour. Even so, we have to splash across the smaller conduits, where the animals stumble and nearly drop us in the water. After fording a swift river, deep enough to reach the stirrups, the ruins of Persepolis appear suddenly around a spur of the hills. I had thought it far away on the further side of the plain, so am startled on seeing an immense platform covered by a forest of shattered columns, jutting out from the mountain in the distance; for a few seconds I hardly realize what it is. . . . Finally we reach the rocky hillside and discover the cleft known as Naqsh-i-Rajab. It is nothing more than a wide fissure running back into the hill some fifty yards or more; here three large surfaces were in Sasanian days smoothed on the rough sides of the rock—in

places overhanging the ground—and covered with gigantic figures in high relief. They represent the King at the head of troops, or receiving the crown from the hands of God; but even more curious than the sculptures themselves, is the thought—how did they come to be placed *here*? What were the people who wrought them? Why did they carve them in this crevice, near which apparently no city ever was? How were kings honoured by images so remotely placed? With what rites did men come here? and what were their feelings when they gazed on the forms at whose weather-worn remnants I am now looking? These queries are none the less insistent, because no archæologist can ever give me their answer.

The clouds have long been threatening rain; when we ride away, the sky is covered with a leaden shroud and the light pallid—though it is only three o'clock. A wild wind blows across the now bleak plains, seeming to strike with separate blows every nerve in the body. When the extremity of the hills bounding the valley has been rounded, Persepolis comes into sight again, in this light sombre as a wreck. I dismount directly under the terrace; it towers over me, a wall without break or decoration, except for the recess in which the immense flight of stairs ascends. It is built of enormous blocks of stone; at the corners and over the stairway, green shrubs grow out between the joints, creating a romantic drapery Piranesi would have loved. There is nothing but

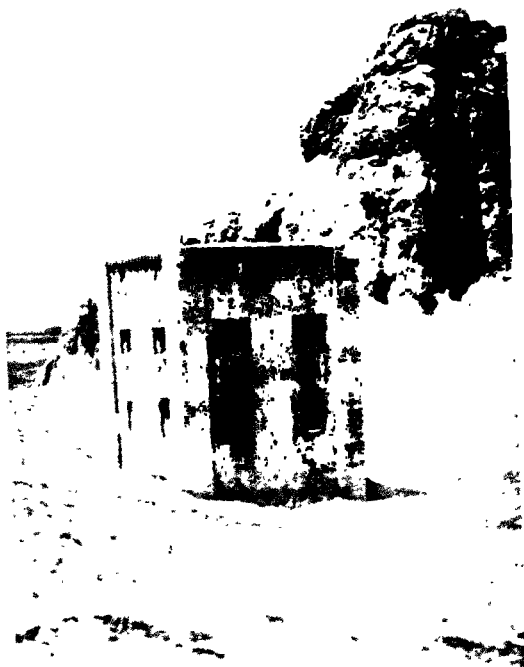
a long wall without ornament of any sort; yet its vast scale and absolute simplicity make it one of the most impressive monuments I have ever beheld. The flights of stairs are so broad and so gradually inclined, they must have been designed for the stately progress of the king in inviolable solitude, preceded by the splendours of the long-stoled priests, and of—

“The warlike soldiers and the gentlemen,
That heretofore have filled Persepolis
With Afric captains taken in the field,
Whose ransom made them march in coats of gold,
With costly jewels hanging at their ears,
And shining stones upon their lofty crests.”

After climbing the now neglected steps, I find myself on an immense platform from which the hillside slopes backward. Below the grey sky, storm clouds of deep violet and black are rushing across the strange forms of the distant mountains; occasionally when they lessen, the sun struggles to break through, lighting the ruins with a fugitive pallor. Directly in front of me stands the Portico of Xerxes, where gigantic figures—with a human head, the body of a lion, and the wings of a bird—keep guard at the portals of the dead. The heads and breasts of these apocalyptic creatures are carved on the narrow face of the walls, their flanks on the sides, up which their wings sweep grandly; so the mass of stone seems rather to grow out of, than to be supported by, these awesome beasts.

Even to-day when half in ruin and defaced by travellers' inscriptions (which delighted Lord Curzon), it is impossible to view unmoved these splendid images, where the three realms of man, beast, and bird, seem united in quasi-divinity. When the majesty of Darius or Xerxes appeared between their undiminished glory, the combined impressiveness of man and masonry must have struck beholders dumb. To the right rise the fragments of the great Hall of Xerxes: a decimated forest of slightly golden columns despoiled of capitals, entablature, and roof. Beyond and on slightly higher ground, are the ruined palaces of Darius and Xerxes—two groups of stone doors and windows now blackened, looking in miniature like Egyptian pylons crowded together. Behind everything, a steep acclivity of bare rock, where three tombs—like but less impressive than those at Naqsh-i-Rustam—have been hewn. A band of Persian holiday-makers from the neighbouring villages and even from Shirāz, fills the ruins of Persepolis; their horses paw the stones in the Palace of Xerxes, and the whole of Takht-i-Jamshīd (as Persians call this spot) resounds with the shouts of men and the cries of women and children. Truly—

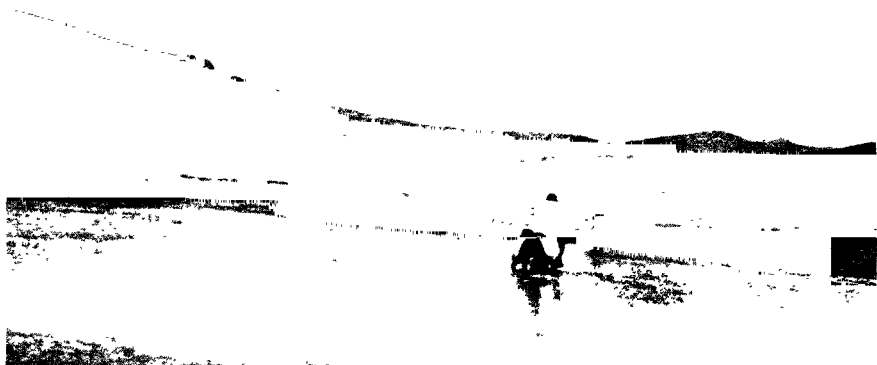
“They say the Lion and the Lizard keep
 The Courts where Jamshyd gloried and drank deep:
 And Bahram, that great Hunter—the Wild Ass
 Stamps o’er his head, but cannot break his sleep.”



The Archæologist's Despair
So-called Fire Temple, Nagsh-i-Rustam



Sāsānian Sculptures near the End of the Cliff, Nagsh-i-Rustam



Fording a Stream on the Way to Persepolis, Plain of Mervdasht



Zoroastrian Fire Altars, Nagsh-i-Rustam

On arriving, I regretted the loveliness which sunlight might give these famous stones; now as I look out over the mournful plain to the rack of inky cloud above the mountains, this gloom and raging wind seem a more fitting background against which to view all that remains of

“The Palace that to Heav’n his pillars threw,
And Kings the forehead on his threshold drew.”

At first, fatigue, nerves unstrung by the wind, and the discordant sounds of holiday-making, prevented my being as much impressed as I had expected. Even now I am not thrilled as I have been in other places, where art and history combine in a manner no imagination can resist; yet I find that in strolling among the shattered marbles, one magnificent impression is borne in upon me more and more strongly. It is the idea of what “divinity doth hedge a king.” If man ever devised a perfect setting for royalty, above all for royalty in the days when it was all but divine, it was this group of fallen stones. Everywhere are carvings of the King, forming practically the only decoration in all Persepolis. Even the placing of these images is peculiar; they are all on the reveal of doors and windows, which are very deep—sometimes over four feet. They are in bas-relief and with figures in profile only. Although too numerous to count, all are—on varying scales—reproductions of a few themes. The

King, with curled beard and locks, in his hands a staff and lotus-wand, is followed by two attendants; one holds a parasol over the royal person, and the other carries with uplifted arms a handle with a horse's tail curving over the King's crown; often the symbol of Ahūramazda floats above the parasol. Elsewhere rows of subjugated warriors carrying platforms, rise from the bottom of the sculpture, tier upon tier, until only just enough room remains to depict the King enthroned beneath the Egyptian emblem of eternity, with attendants behind the lofty throne foot-stool. Or again the King is engaged in single combat with a lion standing on its hind legs and about to claw the royal huntsman, when he drives his sword to the hilt in the belly of the beast. The King is always represented on a much larger scale than other figures, a primitive but not ineffectual convention to suggest his more than human grandeur. As far as I can see there is no attempt to portray Darius or Xerxes or any other individual; all seem to be representations of the King—symbols of something more than man. The repetition of these few scenes to decorate this entire terrace of palaces, may seem monotonous; but there can be no doubt that these ancient artists understood the tremendous effect of simplicity, and of one idea deliberately reproduced to the exclusion of all else.

What must not have been the impression made on all who traversed these lofty and open halls?

Wherever he moved, the sovereign was confronted with images of his glory; and his followers—however accustomed to the sight—could not have been other than affected by the incessant recurrence of signs proclaiming the sacrosanct majesty of him they served. In such a setting, these old-time rulers must have known sensations of omnipotence and the possession of divine nature but slightly veiled, such as modern men cannot in their wildest imaginings conceive. They must indeed have exclaimed:—

“Is it not passing brave to be a King,
And ride in triumph through Persepolis?
A god is not so glorious as a King.
I think the pleasure they enjoy in Heaven,
Cannot compare with kingly joys on earth.”

Think what a Darius or a Xerxes must have felt, as he throned it on high at the end of so vast an audience-hall! Robed in all that is delicate and splendid, wearing—

“ . . . A crown encased with pearl and gold,
Whose virtues carry with it life and death,”

dust of gold sprinkled on his long locks and curled beard; he is seated aloft on a throne of precious stones, his sandalled and bejewelled feet resting on a foot-stool. Princely attendants bearing the insignia of his might, hold above him the imperial parasol. Around him is a forest of tall fluted shafts of marble, where on every capital two bulls

support an inlaid ceiling of perfumed cedar. Great hangings preciously embroidered curtain off the outer world, but at the end leave a clear view across the plains of Mervdasht. There they stretch, vast expanses of meadowy ground, bounded far off by low ranges of barren rock; a featureless scene, but in its wide sweep not without grandeur; above all, one ideal for its purpose, since it offers no dominant mass of mountains or other feature, which might suggest to the King the existence of powers mightier than he. Enthroned above everyone, the King as he looks through the splendid hall, out across the benign earth, can see nothing he may not command—unless it be that Ahūramazda, whose winged symbol floats above him. And in his heart of hearts, he probably says to himself: "What is Ahūramazda to me?" It is said that even so mean a measure of absolute power as man can attain, brings with it satiety; surely in these hieratic sovereigns, weariness of all things must at times have been compensated by an almost divine dilation of thought and feeling, such as can no longer fall to the lot of any man.

Think too of what must have been in another order, the emotions of a man for the first time admitted in these halls to the presence of the King of Kings! After crossing the plains, and mounting the wide stairs between rows of richly garbed attendants; he passes through the awe-inspiring portico to find himself in the consecrated precinct,

gazing at the King enshrined like an idol at the end of columnar vistas. He must indeed have felt awe, and that too is uplifting; for like love, terror, or any violent emotion, it expands the whole being, crowding into a few seconds an amplitude of feeling an entire life might otherwise not give. This man may well be envied—for awe is a sensation that has practically passed from our existence to-day. Even when we believe in the Divine, we no longer expect to find it incarnate or even manifest. Nor can nature give us the sensation; she may terrify or crush us, but—despite mystery still inscrutable—we have pierced too many secrets to feel the dread that is aroused by things too lofty to grasp. As for man, however much we may love or revere him, what human being fills us with awe to-day? This feeling, aroused by the presence of something thought more than human, has been lost like many others known to our mysterious forbears; they were paid for by the misery of millions, but at moments the privileged among these ancient races must have achieved a particular form of perfection we shall never see. Their lives must, however, have been a curious mixture of splendour and discomfort; each of these palaces (where kings dwelt) is no more than a single room surrounded by porticos, through which the living sovereigns might see the tombs of those who went before. This vast terrace is really nothing more than one palace on a scale perhaps never surpassed. The

residence of the courtiers and the lodging of followers must have been elsewhere.

Riding across the plains to Kināra, as darkness falls and the storm descends on the mountains, at whose foot lie the all-overseeing tombs of the Achæmenians, I turn to look for the last time at the mighty but discrowned pillars standing on the terrace of Persepolis. As I move away, I realise that the spot has stirred me far more deeply than I at first suspected. While there, I thought but little about Alexander, my mind being too busy with the magnificent monarchs who built this unique abode. Riding between wind-rippled fields of grain, I cannot help thinking how the conqueror, whom we imagine to have been a young Apollo, must—at some hours—have been rather a besotted vandal. It is true that with too fine a sensibility he could never have been a great captain; still, I should rather have had him leave a corner of the world unconquered than burn the glories of Persepolis.

April 18th

Crossing the plain of Mervdasht from Kināra to rejoin the main road from Sivand to Shīrāz, Persepolis on its throne and Naqsh-i-Rustam are visible far across the meadows. At first there is sun, but soon the sky grows grey and wind rises, striking us with wild gusts. Before long we reach a muddy stream, crawling through a featureless



Sāsānian Cliff Sculpture, Nagsh-i-Rajab

The cliff in the distance is Nagsh-i-Rustam on the other side of the plain of Mervdasht



Ruins of Persepolis

"The Palace That to Heav'n His Pillars Thier"



The Portico of Xerxes, Persepolis



Palace of Darius, Persepolis

country between banks of clay without trees or shrubs; it is spanned by a high stone bridge, now so ruinous that to cross it is far from pleasant. This is the river Bandamīr—made famous by Moore's vulgar verses:

“There's a bower of roses by Bendameer's stream
And the nightingale sings round it all the day long.”

Had he ever seen the spot, his anapaestic sentimentality would have received a shock. Then we traverse marsh-land on the remnants of an old road of broken stone, and after rounding a hill, come in sight of Zarghān. On the outskirts are curious wells built on the same principle as those in the Algerian M'zab; only, here mules and oxen are used to draw the water in place of camels. This coincidence is very striking in countries so unrelated.

I find a lodging in an old house that must once have been a master-work. With the outer world the only communication is through the entrance gates. The house surrounds a large court, with water tanks and what once were flower-beds; it is divided into two parts, on the one side an edifice of two stories; on the other of only one. The walls are of dried clay framed and patterned with white stucco; large areas around the window openings are filled with screens of pierced wood, beautifully designed and executed. My room must once have been delightful; it is covered with stucco

ornamentation painted in bright colours; in the wall-recesses there is honeycomb vaulting, above pictures of little birds perched on stiff bouquets; colour, gold, and carving, cover all the surfaces. Now everything is ruin—the doors open when I arrived, filth an inch deep on the floors, birds and cats the only inhabitants. Sightings such as these are what make travel so distressing here. Just because Persia was once highly civilised and filled with works of art, its ruin and filth are to-day more painful to see than any sight in countries always barbarous. The little that is left to-day, she neglects or destroys—indifferent to all that once formed her glory.

April 19th

To-day's is the last stage between me and Shirāz, —a very pleasant thought. On leaving Zarghān there is a pretty view of the town in the chill morning light. At the foot of a great cliff, houses of brownish clay—much the colour of the rock towering above—are clustered, rising in tiers one above the other, with little towers and tiny *loggie*, as though the inhabitants were trying to imitate an Italian hill-town. Above the roofs two cypresses rise—the first I have seen in Persia. The road soon begins to climb between barren hills, green and brown with stains of orange; then descends suddenly to cross a plain, and once more ascends an almost perpendicular hill strewn with

boulders, up which the animals are forced to scramble, panting loudly. Far to the right a mountain dominates the scene with an almost purple cliff. Traffic on the heretofore deserted road, shows that we are approaching a large city; camels pass in caravans or graze the hillside, whilst their bales strew the ground; bands of men pass on foot, carrying long sticks; men, women, and children, troop by on mules and donkeys. We now begin to descend gradually but steadily; beside the road a clear runnel dashes along between tiny dykes, like all the irrigation conduits I have seen; yet this is the brook of which Ḥāfīz wrote:—

“For sure, in all the enchanted ground
Of Paradise, there are not found,
The fountain brinks of Rukhnabad.”

After many windings we turn the shoulder of an eminence, and Shīrāz lies before me in the V-shaped opening between the hills we are now descending. In the foreground a gateway bars the valley; thence a broad avenue leads toward the city—a flat expanse of pinkish-brown only broken by tapering cypress-trees and one earthen dome. The green plain encircles it, spreading out to the barren mountains that hem it in like a bowl. The colours are charming, but lack the lovely contrast which in Algeria the white houses make with vegetation. It is a pretty but rather featureless scene; yet this is the famous first view of Sa’dī’s

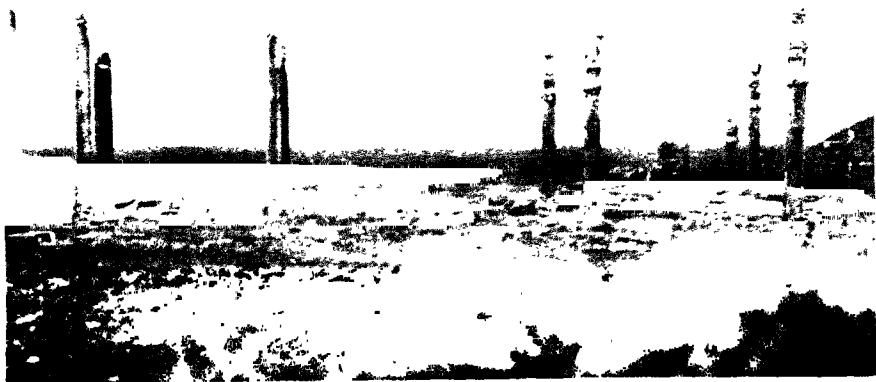
Shīrāz, reputed so beautiful as to force all travelers to halt and cry involuntarily: "Allāhū Akbar!"—God is Great! To this day it goes by the name of the Tang-i-Allāhū Akbar. Like all Persia, it is disappointing. Either the city must in old days have been more beautiful—which is probable—or else it gained its renown by contrast with the desolate country amid which it lies.

Riding through the gateway and out along the broad highway, trees in fresh foliage wave over us, while beneath their shade the Ruknābād leaps down the slope in tiny cascades. Some such spot as this, in his time perhaps a garden-side, Ḥafīz must have had in mind when he wrote of the brook. Only a short time since, this avenue was lined with secular cypress-trees; not having received their pay, the troops felled them to show their dissatisfaction and make firewood! Now it is white and without shade. Fortunately the air is balmy, and out of the walled gardens other cypresses still rear their lustrous cones, so dark a green as to seem black. Suddenly two neat cavalymen in uniform ride up, salute, and speak in excellent English; they have been sent by my host that is to be, Colonel B. A few moments later he gallops up himself; for some unknown reason, I had been expecting a man of middle-age with a black beard, so it is a great surprise to see a very smart young officer. After skirting the town, we reach his house—a large white building with a high colonnade at the back of a lovely garden—where his

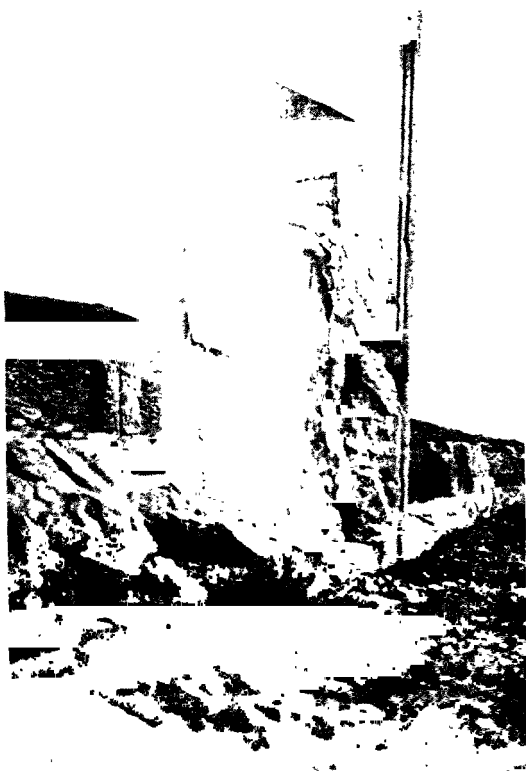
charming wife and mother-in-law are waiting to receive us. My room is filled with fragrant yellow Maréchal Niel roses, and off it there is a bathroom with running water—I think the only one in all Persia. After fourteen solitary days spent in crawling across barren uplands, to find myself the recipient of my countrymen's kind hospitality, is more than pleasant.



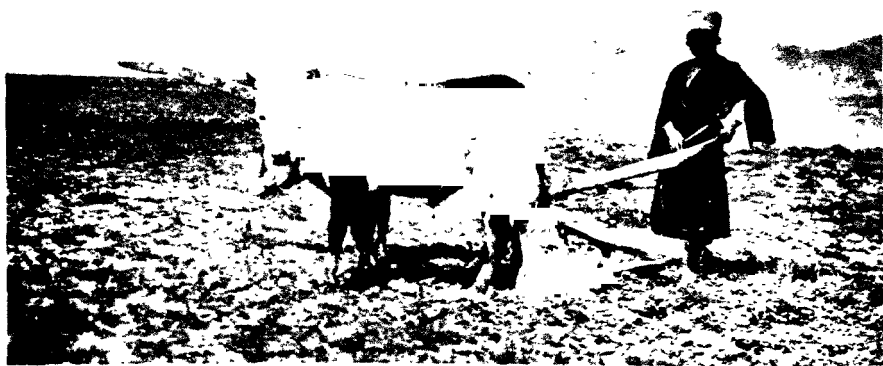
Palace of Xerxes, Persepolis
 " The wild ass stamps over his head "



The Audience Hall of Xerxes and the Plain of Mervdasht in a Storm, Persepolis



Effigy of the King, Persepolis
"Is it not passing brave to be a king?"



A Persian Plough, Plain of Mervdasht

VI

SHĪRĀZ TO BUSHĪR

VI

SHĪRĀZ TO BUSHĪR

April 20th

THIS morning Colonel B. takes me to call on the Governor of Fārs. After driving through narrow and squalid streets, we stop at the gateway of the great regent, Karim Khān's palace. We first enter a large enclosure, which green trees fill with shade, while wild poppies fleck the ground with vermilion spots. In the centre there is a small octagonal building of yellow brick, once the tomb of Karim Khān, now the headquarters of the Army of Fārs. A long narrow tank stretches in front of each of the four principal sides, its water stagnant, and all its jets now stopped. A frieze of exquisite tiles runs round the top of the building; the spandrels are also filled with brilliant tiling, where tiny figures are depicted hunting. The Shāh is seated cross-legged on a low platform, with a bird perched on the railing; his huntsmen are pursuing various animals, including antlered stags, blue elephants, and bright yellow rhinoceroses. The colours—

detached against a white background—are as fresh as if made but yesterday, and have a depth and brilliance no workman could to-day produce. Inside the building a pool of water fills the spot where the tomb once stood; over it there is an extraordinary honeycomb vault, silver-white with gilt edges, painted with birds, and vines, and flowers.

On one side of the court is the royal audience hall, a *loggia* overlooking the gardens. A high band of Yazd marble, painted with landscapes and other patterns, forms a dado; walls and columns are covered with mirror-work, and the ceiling is elaborately painted. In their prime these halls of audience raised a few feet above the ground must have been a splendid sight when the sovereign sat enthroned, and every facet reflected the glint of jewels and the thousand hues of brocade, as the courtiers ranged themselves around him; to-day these tarnished bits of glass and shabby colours seem puerile in their decay.

From here we enter an inner court where cypress and orange-trees grow. The walls and recessed audience-halls are crumbling; roofs and wood-work are decayed and half-fallen; sordid ruin haunts even the palace of the Governor of Fārs. One wall is decorated with the finest Persian tiles I have ever seen: on a white ground, figures nearly life-size among conventional flowers. Lovely yellows are conspicuous, but above all masses of that wonderful rose-purple we see on Chinese

porcelains. The colours are brilliant yet harmonious, and rich as those in ancient enamel. The Governor lives in a modern building in the centre of the court. The room in which he receives us, is filled with European furniture in bad taste; the Persians do not seem to have even that saving grace, an appreciation of their past. So far I have not seen the smallest example of the art, which we in Europe so greatly admire. The Governor is an elderly man, very courteous, but with that sad yet deceitful expression about the drooping corners of the mouth, which I have noticed on so many Persian faces. He has lived in Germany several years, and has also travelled in France; he speaks both French and German, preferably the latter; and has books of German philosophy in the room. In appearance, he is a courteous European; in reality, there is reason to think him a reactionary, who would be glad to have every foreigner in Shīrāz killed. Were I a Persian, I should probably feel the same way. Before leaving, the Governor very civilly invites me to dinner later in the week.

Near the palace, is the building once used as the *andarūn* (women's apartments) of Karim Khān; it is now the office of the Persian Telegraph Co. There is something sardonic about the uses to which these degraded buildings are now put. A lovely old garden with cypress and fruit-trees around a tank shaped like the letter T—which is unusual—still remains; but the walls and column

of the pavilion have been stripped of their decoration, and are bare or daubed with paint.

Rain fell at noon. Driving outside the city at sunset, I find that the pastel colours, which were disappointing when I first looked down on Shīrāz from the hills above, have a delicate charm like that of a faded print by Harunobu. The cypress spires, clustered in the old gardens encircling the city, are very beautiful. The air is chill and pellucid; fields of grain, a deep jewel green, are sparkling with rain drops; tiny clouds of pale orange tinged with pink (the colour of tea roses) hang in a green-gold sky, above mountains streaked with green, brown, and yellow, like marble surfaces.

April 21st

The British Telegraph-Department owns a large compound in Shīrāz with houses for the men in its service; it is neat and charming. The British Consulate, like all British institutions in far countries, is maintained in a way befitting what is—despite its defects—probably the most splendid empire the world has yet seen. The Consul is a most unusual person; still young, he has distinguished himself as the interpreter of a world-famous expedition, and the only living white man who can speak and write one of the most difficult of Asiatic languages. He has been described as “a man . . . with an offhand courtesy which masks an attractively unselfish

nature and a quick and observant eye. I think, like everyone else who is worth knowing, he needs to be known, for it is truer of few people in the world than of" him "that he attends strictly and exclusively to his own business; a touch of the recluse . . . he is still a man with whom no other man, except by his own fault, could fail to be on the best of terms." His intellect is brilliant; his extreme reserve never conceals the real depth and delicacy of his feelings; and his invincible courtesy seems a survival from knightly days. A few hours of his companionship suffice to make one realise that a dreary journey across the wastes of Persia, is well repaid by the privilege of his acquaintance.

The bazars of Shīrāz are long, vaulted passages of yellow brick, like all the others in Persia. The only difference is that here the upper half of the pointed arch opening into the niche-like shops, is closed with a screen of pierced wood. The only picturesque part is the dyers' quarters, where long narrow strips of dark blue are hung across cords to dry, or else depend from the vaults in great festoons, almost touching the passers-by. There is some colour in the saddlers' bazar, where saddle-cloths and leather-work are displayed on the walls and arch-screens—large pieces of cloth or leather usually bright orange or saffron, with long fringes. Aside from these, there is not a single curious or beautiful object for sale, nothing but trash from Europe. Intercommunication has killed all local

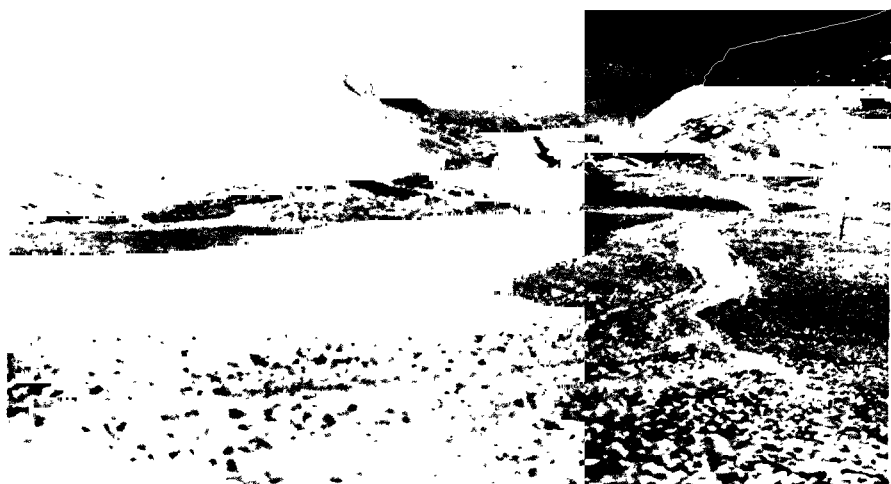
customs the world over, and has—with the aid of machinery—replaced by vulgar products of commerce the native handwork that, however rude, was at least sincere. We know all this, yet continue travelling, lured by the hope that we shall some day find a country where this is not true.

April 22nd

Shīrāz is not an entirely peaceful place even in the year 1914. Only a few months ago the Belgian Collector of Finances was dining at this house. During dinner, a servant left the compound by the gate leading toward the Collector's house; he was mistaken for the Collector and fifteen shots were fired at him—without injury!—by men posted in the ditches beside the road. The doorway is still riddled with the bullets. Investigation proved this to be an attempt on the Collector's life, organised by the richest and most influential man in Shīrāz. He was arrested and—as justice is here accessible to bribes—was deported. With this affair still fresh in everyone's memory, it was rather startling to hear a shot just as we were going in to dinner to-night; but this time nothing exciting had happened.

April 23rd

It has now rained for the greater part of three days—at this season an unheard-of occurrence.



Tang-i-Allāhū Akbar

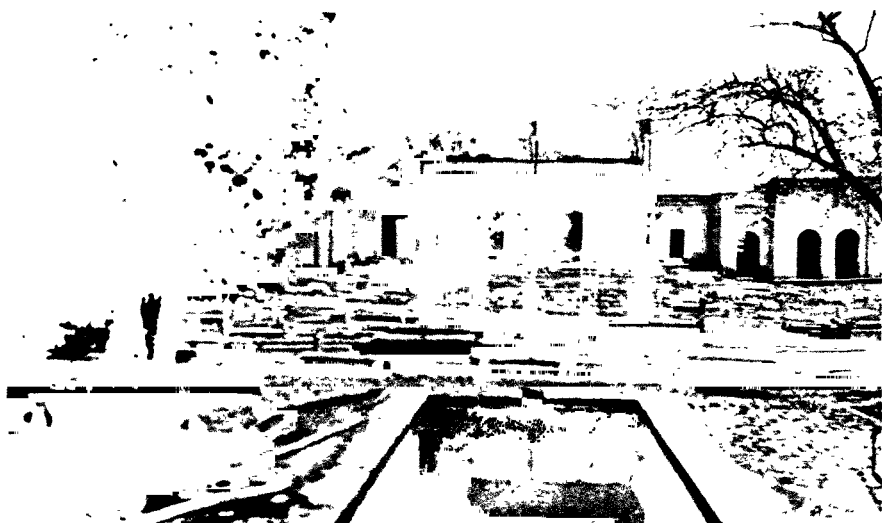
The first view of Shirāz, supposed to cause all travellers to exclaim, in admiration, " God is Great! "



A Namesake of Timūr Lāng: Timūr Tabrizi



Graves in the Enclosure of Hāfiz's Tomb, Shirāz



The Tomb of Hāfiz, Shirāz
The canopy is vulgar modern ironwork gaudily painted

Early this morning not a cloud was visible, but at present the sky is overcast; nevertheless in desperation I start out to see what remains of the sights, once the pride of Shīrāz. A namesake of Tamerlane, Colonel B.'s orderly, Tīmūr, a tall Tabrīzī, precedes the carriage on horseback, his silver pistol-case slung across his shoulders by an embroidered baldric. In a few minutes rain begins to fall in sheets. When we reach the city, what once were streets, are now rivers of reddish water on whose surface rain-drops rebound. It would be hard to find a drearier picture than this clay-built town, with its soaking walls and streaming streets under a sky of the deepest violet, that seems to fling down the rain in anger. The tombs of Ḥafīz and Sa'dī are on the opposite side of the river; on my arrival the entire bed was dry—a wide expanse of sand and stone where not even one rill meandered; to-day it is filled to the banks by an opaquely rufous stream, running so swiftly as almost to sweep away the cattle being forced across it from the opposite bank. It is spanned by a single bridge; built in days when carriages were unknown, its sharp incline and a high step at either end, render it impracticable for wheeled traffic. (Even to-day, the carriages in Shīrāz can be counted on one's fingers.) When Tīmūr has found a possible ford, we cross slowly with water dashing over the carriage steps.

After winding among mud hovels and passing a field of opium-poppies, where a few large white

or purple blossoms remain undestroyed by rain, we reach the Tomb of Ḥafiz just as the sun begins to reappear. It lies in one of those gardens so thickly scattered on the outskirts of the city. In general arrangement they are all alike: a plot of ground entirely enclosed, on three sides high walls of baked yellow brick with pointed arcades in slight relief, on the fourth a pavilion raised some three or four feet above the earth. This usually comprises a lofty *loggia*, closed of course at the back, and flanked by two stories of very small rooms. I had always heard that the grave of Persia's favourite poet was well cared for and enclosed by a beautiful screen; so expected for once to find a charming spot,—it proves one delusion more. A few trees grow in one corner; elsewhere there is no room, the whole enclosure being roughly paved with the tombstones of devotees, who wished their ashes to lie near those of Ḥafiz. The poet is buried, not—as might be expected—in the centre of the court, but somewhat to one side. The grave is covered by a high slab of marble (inscribed with one of his odes) on which a common vase filled with lilacs is placed. Over it is an iron pavilion; ten rods, enclosed by a screen of vulgar design, support a metal roof, from which iron flags rise. It is brightly painted with blue, black, and gold, the flags being brilliantly coloured like toys. Anything more tawdry, more unsuited to canopy the dust of a world-famous writer, would be hard to find. The man who wrote:

“Open my grave when I am dead and thou shalt see a cloud of smoke rising from out of it; then shalt thou know that the fire still burns in my dead heart—yea, it has set my very winding-sheet alight”;—rests under a shoddy structure well fitted to shelter the gross patrons of a German beer-garden. Standing here, ‘Umar’s shabby sepulchre at Nishāpūr seems less distressful. A view of cypress spires in a garden filled with tangled grass is the one thing poetic; but even this is marred by being seen through the ruined *loggia*, where the roof has fallen and the floor is littered with heaps of dirt and rotten wood. No ruins I have seen are so slovenly and unromantic as those of the delicate Persian buildings once veneered and coloured.

In a chapel-like room opening off the court, are the tombs of the most powerful family of nobles in Shīrāz. Graves and building are neat and in good repair; but the vulgarity of every object seems incredible in a land which created one of the most exquisite forms of art the world has seen. The grave-stones are covered with ugly cloths and European bath-towels; on these, tawdry lamps with painted or gilded shades, have been placed in rows; the room looks like a booth at a county-fair. It is a dispiriting sight, in that it brings home the decadence of a race which once lead the world in refinement of taste. At the tomb of Ḥafīz, where I expected some form of loveliness, I have found only vulgarity and decay; I leave feeling more depressed than sad.

A short distance further on, we reach the Garden of the Forty Dervishes. Outside the entrance is a real dervish, with long black hair and beard, dressed in flowing white robes, and looking as though he had just stepped out of the Bible. Within, the slabs which mark the forty graves, lie along the walls in two rows, under a tangle of orange and cypress-trees now growing wild. Here the pavilion has no *loggia*, all the openings being closed by pierced wooden screens. In the principal room men are seated on the floor, smoking *qalyūns* and drinking tea; for Persians still foregather in these ancient gardens. Walking about under the shade of splendid trees between high walls, it is impossible not to be impressed with the secrecy of Persian life. Everything takes place in jealously guarded seclusion, behind walls that defy the curious. Of course, the Persian's desire to enjoy the company of his women unveiled, has much to do with this; but about such imprisoned privacy, there is to us something stifling. A walled garden is a lovely spot, but here the walls are so high they make one sigh for a glimpse over the city toward the hills. Close at hand is another garden—that of the Seven Dervishes, so called for reasons I cannot discover. From the outside these Shīrāz gardens are so highly pictorial, they seem arranged by famous painters. Hieratic cypress-trees raise their black cones symmetrically above the buff walls, outlined against the tawny flank of hardby hills. Within,

this garden is more than usually elaborate, and must in its prime have been a place of enchantment. The *loggia* is wainscotted with that curious marble, greenish-white and only semi-opaque, which comes from Yazd. Three frescos are still clearly visible; one of them strangely enough represents Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac. In front of the pavilion lies a stone terrace with long tanks, where jets of water once rose and fell; beyond that, the cypress alley extends to the wall sternly closing the delightful prospect. Just visible through the cunningly wrought screen, a man is seated at a second-storey window, filling the enclosure with a monotonous psalmody. The painted stucco is crumbling from the walls, the roof is falling, the window-screens hang in pieces, the water pools are stagnant, the stone facings are cracked and filled with weeds, and what was once the garden, is now a tangled wilderness. In its splendour, when trim and cultivated, with refined pleasure-lovers in beautiful robes strolling through its alleys, it must have been as lovely a spot as man could devise. Indeed, in places such as this, even now it is possible dimly to conceive the loveliness which caused Shīrāz to resound with the praise of poets. Built in a fertile plain surrounded by barren but fair-coloured hills, this city girdled with secret gardens, where birds sang and poets lay in the cypress shade, must indeed have been an Elysian dwelling. Even in decay, these old gardens still retain a charm of their own, and are

the only things possessed of a little poetry that I have seen in Persia. It is pitiful to think that within a few years, they will have fallen into ruin beyond repair; and that within a half-century not one remnant of Persia's splendour will remain.

The famous Dilgushā Bāgh — the Heart-Expanding Garden—although untended, is still a vast and lovely enclosure, filled with lofty cypress and lustrous orange-trees growing in high grass. The sun has disappeared once more, and great storm-clouds sweep across the sky as we drive to Sa'dī's Tomb, which lies at the foot of the hills beyond even the outskirts of Shīrāz. The tomb is of course inside a walled garden, but unlike Ḥafīz, Sa'dī is buried in the centre of a bare and whitewashed room overlooking the garden. The grave is marked by an inscribed slab inside a metal screen; it is not impressive, but all the surroundings are neat, free from vulgarity, and less ruinous than usual. Consequently it is possible to stand with pleasure beside the burial-place of this famous lover of the rose, who once wandered over nearly all the world known in those olden days, only to lay his dust in a garden outside the town where he was born. The youth who has the tomb in charge, brings out a beautiful manuscript of Sa'dī's poems, in a once splendid binding on which a tracery of rose-branches still shows. As we drive home the rain falls heavily once more.

In the afternoon my kindly hosts take me to visit the Bāgh-i-Takht, a royal garden built by

Āghā Muhammad Khān—the cruel Qājār eunuch, who founded the reigning dynasty. To cross the river above the bridge, is even more difficult than it was this morning below it. The river-side is muddy, so two boys with their skirts tucked in their girdles, run along and tug at the wheels with loud cries of “Yā! ‘Ali!” whenever we stick fast. The carriage drops into the river with a splash, and nearly overturns as the horses stop short; when we reach the other bank they can hardly drag us out. The Bāgh-i-Takht deserves its name—the Throne Garden; it is built on the hillside on top of seven terraces, rather like an Italian villa, and quite different from anything I have seen in Persia. The terraces are very narrow—little wider than large steps—and adorned with elaborate water-works; the retaining walls are faced with small arcades once gay with tiles. In front of the superimposed terraces, running their whole width, is an immense tank now dry, with fragments of a central fountain from which four lions once spouted water. Tank and terrace-basins are now merely sunken spaces with fissured stone margins and bottoms covered with earth. Of the great walls once enclosing the garden, no sign remains, and of trees, only one alley to the right of the tank—although many others were still standing a few years ago. Under the cypress-shade the body of the unfortunate Swedish officer killed at Kazarūn a few months ago, has been buried. The new grass seems doubly sad this

afternoon, for word has just come that another of the Swedish officers—a young and charming man whom I often met at Tīhrān—has just been killed by brigands. There are moments when the whole wretched country does not seem worth the life of one European. Of the buildings on the terrace-top nothing remains; just a few shabby modern houses, in one of which the English physician has installed a hospital that, in remote Shīrāz, is a monument to what British energy can accomplish. A few sick and wounded *gendarmes* look out of the windows across the ruin of what once was a Shāh's pleasure dwelling.

The elements, as well as the natives, do all they can to lay waste the gardens of Shīrāz. Last night's storm unchained all its fury on the Bāgh-i-Naw, where the English manager of the Bank now lives; this morning all but one of the splendid cypress-trees lie uprooted in a tangled ruin.

April 25th

The rain continues to fall in heavy showers, and has postponed my departure for Bushīr. In the afternoon it is clear enough to permit me to visit the Bāgh-i-Iram, which is still inhabited. It is the largest and most beautiful garden I have seen in Persia. The house is two-storeyed and of stucco, with three *loggie* and curiously shaped pediments on the second storey. Tiles decorate various parts, particularly fine ones in the pedi-



The View from Hāfiz's Tomb, Shiraz



Garden of the Forty Dervishes, Shirāz



Inside the Garden of the Seven Dervishes, Shirāz



Garden of the Seven Dervishes, on the Outskirts of Shirāz

ments where the Shāh is depicted in his garden. Altogether it is a fanciful but pleasant dwelling. A large court precedes it, divided into four parterres by paved pathways and a long tank. Here orange and lemon-trees grow alternately, among rose bushes covered with pink blossoms; flowers, trees, and houses, all mirrored in the water. Behind the villa lies a large and splendid garden; first of all a stone terrace with a deep pool of clear water, and beyond that as fine an alley as any garden can boast—an avenue of trim grass, where in the centre a narrow water-channel runs down the levels, each only a few inches lower than the one preceding; on either side an endless line of stately trees. Each row starts with a single stone-pine, a high branchless trunk terminating in a wide umbrella of dark boughs; then great cypress-trees, centuries old and almost black, interspersed with planes so trimmed that only a clump of bright green leaves is left on top of the long trunks, densely draped with brown-berried ivy. The contrast between the varying greens is delightful, while the slimness and pallor of the plane-trees make the cypresses seem darker and more immense. To right and left of the main avenue, like lateral aisles flanking a cathedral nave, are narrower alleys of slender pines. The vista down the long aisle of cypress and plane is finally closed by a small pavilion, through which the water conduit passes into still another enclosure. The whole garden, while very old and

somewhat overgrown, is in no way neglected. It can bear comparison with the villas of Italy, and really is not unworthy of what the words "a Persian garden" suggest. The storm is sweeping towards us again, and black clouds close the stately aisle; but this old garden I shall always recall as the one thing in Persia that has given me unalloyed delight. What must not have been the charm of Shīrāz, when it abounded in such gardens as this, where pleasure-seekers subtly refined listened to music and the impassioned verse of Sa'di or of Ḥafiz?

April 27th

The charm of Shīrāz grows with time. Its situation is really full of grace; the plain in which it lies, although large, is still small enough to seem well sheltered; while the hills surrounding it are beautiful in colour, and just high enough to please yet not to oppress. The whole valley is now a smiling field of vivid green, spread about Shīrāz like the skirts of a mantle. Seen nearby, it is a sorry town; but from a distance when only its cypress spires and a few domes show, it might still be the home of poets. Driving toward the Gulshan garden, the road passes through fields of young grain—broad surfaces of emerald rippling slowly in the breeze. Wild poppies grow by the wayside, or in the fields make an occasional splash of scarlet sprinkled with the blue of corn-

flowers, half hidden below taller stalks of grain and poppies. The larger part of Gulshan is modern; but an old terrace with a basin of stagnant water, about which cypresses are grouped, still remains. Beyond this, is a long alley, where the feathery foliage of pale green *chinārs* contrasts delightfully with the sombre cypress-trees. Behind them a thicket stretches, full of large snow-ball bushes hung with pure white globes. The conduit, once murmuring with water, now lies dry and cracked. Through the trees distant mountain-tops are just visible, and the air is noisy with the bubbling croak of frogs, floating in the basin with distended cheeks.

April 28th

To-day I accompany my hostess, when she calls at the Bāgh-i-Iram. We are ushered in by the chief eunuch, a person of almost black skin and uncertain age. A eunuch dressed in a frock-coat and a European overcoat, seems an anomaly. I remain in the fore-court, while Mrs. B. enters the house to pay her visit to the *khānum* or chief wife of the owner, who is the person recently deported for instigating the attempt on the life of the Collector of Finances. In full sunlight the garden seems even lovelier than before. The roses now being in full bloom, each bush is a pink mass of widespread blossom, about to scatter its petals. Half hidden among the glossy leaves of

the orange and lemon-trees, which alternate so picturesquely with the roses, are small closed buds, round and white like pearls; a few have already begun to open and fill the air with intoxicating scents. To my intense surprise, the head eunuch soon comes out, bringing word that the *khānum* wishes to receive me. However elderly, I feel sure the lady would not have extended so unusual an invitation, were her lord not in exile.

I find the *khānum* and Mrs. B. in a scrupulously neat room with a fine carpet. I have been told that she is old, and what I can see of her, bears this out. She is enveloped from head to foot in a veil of light blue silk, held across the face so that the eyes alone are visible. Two female attendants are present, their more loosely drawn veils permitting me to see that they are almost black. The eunuch stands in front of the door, holding one of his hands in the other. Through great windows opening on a balcony, I overlook the beautiful garden caressed by sun, and hear a continual twittering of birds dominated by a nightingale's liquid call. Conversation is formal and limited, as Mrs. B. speaks but little Persian and I none. After we have been offered cakes and sweets, which I find difficult to swallow politely, we are taken to see the view from the principal room. Situated on the garden axis, it rises through two storeys like an audience-chamber, and is entirely open on the garden side. The great basin lies at my feet, its green water rippled by

wind; beyond it, stretches the glorious cypress alley, with the *chinār* tops emerging at intervals like emerald banners. This tiled residence—despite its modern furnishing—will, with its wonderful old garden, always remain in my mind as the one thing I have seen in Persia which conveys an impression of what life must have been in the days of Shāh 'Abbās.

April 29th

To-day a last drive to visit the gardens that have pleased me most. The poppy fields near the Tomb of Ḥafīz are in full bloom; masses of sturdy foliage from which long stalks rise, carrying wide crinkled cups of white or at times magenta. At the Garden of the Seven Dervishes, as soon as I enter I am conscious that the orange-trees have begun to blossom, for the air is redolent with a faint but heady perfume. Ruined as it is, the ancient pleasance is still a lovely spot. To escape the company of my escort, without whom etiquette forbids one to move in Shīrāz, I mount to one of the little chambers in the second-storey pavilion. Leaning on a ruined window-screen, the whole garden spreads below me. Here cypresses are for once replaced by magnificent pines, with tall shaggy boles—golden red near the ground, but grey where the boughs begin to spread their parasol of green needles. Between the rows of pine, orange-trees grow, with the waxen white of

new buds just visible among the shining leaves. Untended flowers are scattered among weeds and wild grass. In the centre of the enclosure, under the broad shade of a tree resembling maples, the Seven Dervishes are buried beneath blocks of stone, inscribed with beautiful Persian characters enclosed in cartouches. At my feet the tree-tops are reflected on the stagnant olive surface of the terrace basin, beside which a few flowers give a touch of brilliant colour. A woman, wrapped in a mantle of rusty black, crouches beside the tank at the feet of the dervish I saw the other day. Dressed in a single garment of dirty white, leaving his chest bare, with his bronzed skin, hatless head (here very unusual), and long black locks, he seems an apostle come to life. Above the wall through the pines, I can see the tapering cypress-trees in the neighbouring garden; while far away across green meadows the roofs of Shīrāz stretch in fawn-coloured rows. In places clusters of foliage interrupt their lines, and over all two pointed domes appear to float. The air is still, except for passing breezes that just sway the smallest branches and then die. The only sounds are: the buzzing of a fly, the caw of distant crows, and the whirr of a pigeon's flight. The sky is not hidden, but veiled by a haze of uniform grey, through which light filters like a tremulous ghost. The stillness and abandon of all in sight breed melancholy, but one that is gentle and pleasant to savour.



The Tomb of Sa'di, Outside Shiráz



Windows of the Room where Sa'di is Buried, Shiráz



A Hospital in the Ruins of a King's Pleasure Dwelling

The Bigh-i-Takht, or Throne Garden, was built by the ferocious Aghâ Muhammad Khân, Qājār, founder of the reigning Persian dynasty, and is now used as a hospital



Palace of Karim Khân, Shirâz

On the way to Sa'di's Tomb, the fields are dotted with groups of women squatting on the ground beside the rivulets, washing and drying their linen. Near the enclosure a crowd of men is busy, washing lamb-skins in the brook, and then spreading them in rows to dry beside the road, like giant beetles flattened out. The first spring day would seem to have brought all the townsfolk out to take the air; the formerly deserted court of Sa'di's Tomb is thronged with men seated under the trees smoking *qalyūns*, while the women prepare food in separate groups. As I pass they draw their black veils across their faces, but their white masks are thrown back, leaving eyes and forehead visible. At the pavilion windows men are smoking cross-legged on the floor, precisely as depicted in ancient miniatures. A love of flowers and the open, courtesy, and hospitality, are virtues which still redeem the Persians. The guardian of the tomb hastens to present me with a small bouquet of purple iris—a pleasant gift, even when offered to obtain a fee. Having really come to see the illuminated manuscript, I ask to have it brought. It is a joy to turn the half-soiled pages of this old book, with its fine calligraphy enclosed in irregular cartouches shaped like clouds. The intervals are fitted with gold, traced with tiny flowerets in bright clear colours like enamel. Some leaves have a solid border, where gold, indigo, and carmine, glitter as though laid but yesterday. There are a few paintings,

much damaged but still fair. The delicacy of the flowers, the intricacy of design, and the perfect taste, are beyond praise. The whole book is like jewel work; turning the pages, it is painful to think that negligence will soon destroy it—unless saved by sale to a foreigner, which elsewhere could be vandalism.

The Dilgushā Bāgh is also thronged with poor folk come to enjoy an outing. Several women, veiled in pale blue and pink silk, hurry down a path to escape my presence. They must be persons of quality to wear such unusual stuffs. Men and women stroll about, or sit in the shade of orange-trees. When they walk, these black-stoled figures, with a white patch where a face should be, look more like inauspicious phantoms than like women. The old garden where some noble Shīrāzī once enjoyed a guarded privacy, is to-day the ruined playground of the poor. The crowd and the company of my orderly, who feels it his duty to keep within ten feet of me, prevent my lingering. Shīrāz, girdled with yellow-green hills and crowned with the sombre cypresses of its ancient gardens, set down among green meadows and white fields of opium-poppy, is the one place in Persia that has really charmed me.

To-morrow I start for Bushīr, the Persian Gulf, and a boat to India. I am to have the pleasure of escorting Mrs. B.'s mother as far as Bushīr. We are to have a guard of soldiers and an officer belonging to the newly formed Army of Fārs, as

the road is still insecure; indeed a few months ago it would scarcely have been safe to travel, even with a larger escort. My guide, Ḥusayn, I discharged yesterday, since I no longer needed him, and had caught him disobeying orders. He was an inefficient and dirty beast, who made me long for even the days of Āghājān. Colonel B. is sending his head servant—who speaks English—with us, and also various conveniences and provisions; so we should travel with a comfort I have as yet not known. Departure at each stage is painful; one is reluctant to leave comfort and pleasant places, above all to lose the company of hosts whose consideration and hospitality have made a visit memorable. This regret is, in places so remote, heightened by the thought that probably one may never meet them again.

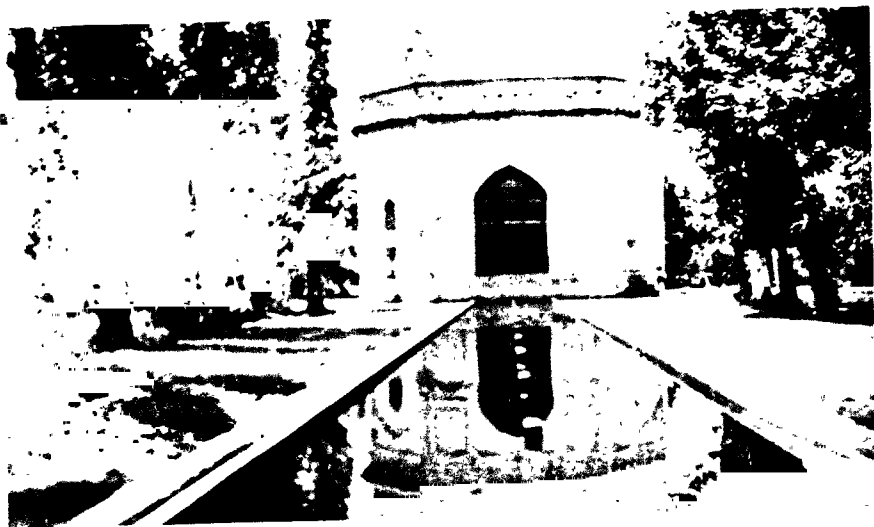
April 30th

At four o'clock it was still night and the stars brilliant; but they soon dimmed, as the dark sky began to pale and turn golden green along the horizon. Full day has now broken, cool and fresh after the showers of last night, and all the poplars are bowing in the breezes. The mules and escort were ordered to be here at four o'clock, but five has passed before they arrive; it is six when they finally leave. At seven Mrs. D. and I start in the carriage to overtake the caravan at the first stage. Colonel and Mrs. B. with our escort

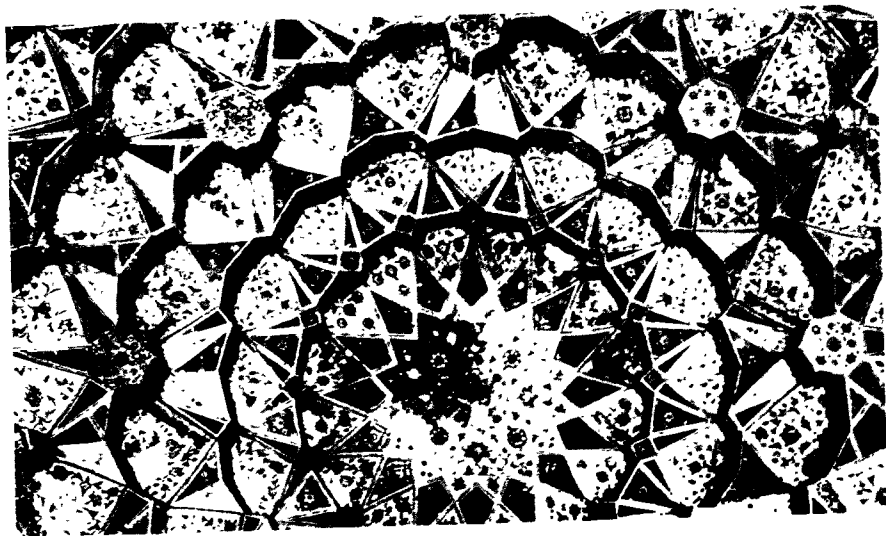
follow on horseback. In the clear light of early morning they are a picturesque sight, galloping after us between green fields of grain, spattered with poppies and swept by wind. In an hour we reach Chinār-i-Rahdār, beyond which carriages cannot go. The mules are waiting, and a crowd has gathered outside the caravanserai to watch our movements.

After farewells have been said to relatives, and—in my case—kindly hosts, whose courtesy has enhanced the pleasures of Shīrāz, we start toward Bushīr. Our caravan is quite imposing; eleven pack animals, Mrs. D., myself, Saïd, two Persian servants sent by Mrs. B., ten mounted soldiers, and an officer. Three of the escort come from the neighbourhood of Tabriz, fine fellows with firm handsome faces and neat bearing, who look as though they might really fight when necessary. Their captain has been to the Jesuit College at Beyrout, where he learned to speak quite fluent French. He is tall, well set up, and very civil; not a bad sort, although his Persian blood obliges him to boast and gallop about continually in the hope of impressing. That he sits a horse splendidly, I must admit.

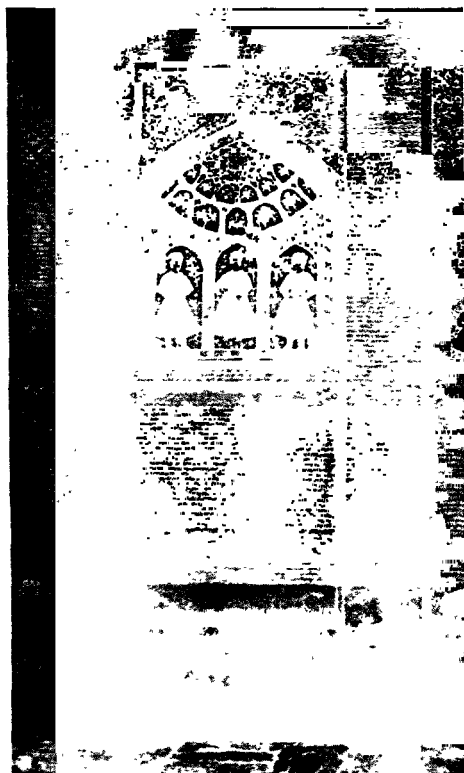
The road rises rapidly among barren hillocks, which from time to time open out, affording views over uplands and valleys. The hills are russet with sandy patches of white; far away the prospect is closed by the side of a mountain, ribbed horizontally and richly coloured purple. Strings



Tomb of Karim Khān, in the Garden of his Palace, Shirāz
Tombstone and body have disappeared, and the building now serves as headquarters
for the army of Fārs



Ceiling of the Tomb of Karim Khān, Shirāz



Tiles in Inner Court Palace of Karim Khān, Shirāz



Where Telegraph Instruments Have Taken the Place of a King's Wives. The Andarūn of Karim Khān, Shirāz

of mules and donkeys pass frequently; for the road to Bushīr was closed to trade for so many months by trouble with the brigands, that it is now alive with caravans conveying congested merchandise. We have already climbed more than a thousand feet above Shīrāz, and the hills have become covered with green and even with shrubs, in Persia always a welcome sight. *Gondarmerie* posts are numerous—fort-like buildings on hill-crests, flying faded flags. An incident typically Persian has just occurred; we came upon a poor donkey lying beside the road, its back one mass of bleeding sores, and its impotent legs folded under the body, as it slowly rolled its enfeebled head in a manner horrible to watch. The owners were walking off, about to leave it to a death of slow agony, since it could no longer take one more tortured step. At my suggestion, one of the escort ended its misery. The poor creature is hardly out of sight, when we meet a camel's carcass almost denuded of flesh, so it is possible to see that one of its hind legs had been broken near the hip. It is more than certain that it was abandoned here without one thought, to agonise for hours if not days. The road in Persia are nothing but endless shambles. To those who can see no difference, except in degree of development, between man and beast, and to whom the sight of suffering in animals is, because of their helplessness, more intolerable than that of men; travel here seems more than can be endured.

The sky has for some time been veiled; storm-clouds now gather, and soon rain begins to fall sharply. Before long, however, the sun reappears. The road winds through a valley, on the edge of a high cliff, above the broad but half-dry bed of a river, twisting its way swiftly through the stones. The trunks of small willows rise in clumps from the water, which rushes by in beryl-coloured streams. Their pleasant sound floats upward, and the eye is gladdened by the first clear brook I have seen in Persia. Khān-i-Zinian has long been visible, and is now drawing rapidly nearer. It is a squalid group of hovels beside a large fortified caravanserai, where a vaulted gateway gives admittance to a courtyard enclosed by high arcades. Although less filthy than some I have encountered, it is not a pleasant resting-place. The assurance that comfortable rooms, maintained by the Telegraph Department, were to be found at every halting-place on the road to Bushīr, proves as delusive as all the other promises of greater comforts, given every time one starts a new journey across Persia.

Night in a Persian caravanserai. A little moon is westering through a grey-blue sky strewn with stars. Though only an upturned white crescent, it gives light enough to see across the court, where a few beasts stand with softly tinkling bells. Here and there a golden expanse breaks the darkness, where a candle is burning in an arcade filled with strange shadows, within which men are

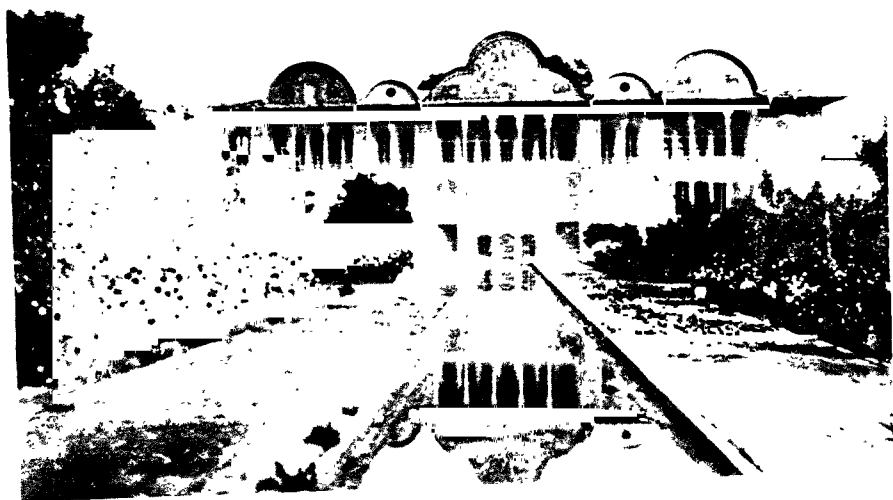
grouped about a tiny fire, cooking or smoking. The hum of voices echoes through the night, at times rising into cries or shrill altercation.

May 1"

To avoid travelling in the heat of mid-day, we are to make a very early start. At three o'clock it is darkest night—the moon having set— and the stars are veiled by mist. Our *chār-wādārs* are unusually bad, making no attempt to load the animals, until I lay about me with a thong given me for the purpose at Shīrāz. Blows being the only language these men understand, a few months in Persia would make a philanthropist turn slaver. When we leave, day has begun to break. Above the mountain-tops behind the caravanserai, hang long trails of copper cloud mingled with others coloured like a bird's breast. Below us the shrunken river runs swiftly through its gravel bed, filling our ears with its swirling murmur as we ride through the chill air of early day. Across the river lies a low range of swelling hills, dotted with trees—a rare sight in so barren a country. Behind them a high but still verdant chain, on which snow lingers, catches on its crests the first flush of the ascending sun. Ahead of us the sky is lifeless yet, covered with violet films of cloud. Before long the road drops toward the river, where a picturesque old bridge with green bushes waving from its crannies, crosses the grey

expanse of gravel. Several streams meander through the river bed, and have to be forded before reaching the bridge; their clear aquamarine water twisting among willows and silver gravel is pleasant to see.

After a sudden turn, a cliff-like row of peaks appears suddenly above the dull green hills we have skirted, catching a gleam of sun, and outlined in luminous grey against a sky of deep violet. The road now climbs the steep face of a long spur, until it reaches a slowly rising ridge, then takes its way between thorny trees just putting forth small leaves. Far below to the right, the river is visible winding through the valley from a point where the view is closed by a rocky pyramid of grey mountain streaked with snow. On the left a brook is precipitated down a small ravine. Behind us the plain of Khān-i-Zinian stretches its green levels, until the mountain cliffs hem it in. Above us a fortified *gendarmerie* post perches on a crest beside the road. When we pass, three or four *gendarmes* line up and salute; the head and shoulders of another show above the tower parapet, looking too big for the tiny tower—precisely as figures do in the rude images of early art. After a little the road enters a level upland then turns suddenly, revealing the plain around Dasht-i-Arzhan far below us, enclosed by hills like a flat-bottomed bowl. It stretches from side to side without an undulation, marbled green broken by a white expanse, and—far away near one edge



One Persian Garden Not in Ruins: Bāgh-i-Iram, Shirāz



Forecourt, Bāgh-i-Iram, Shirāz



The Upper End of the Great Alley, Bāgh-i-Iram, Shirāz

—by the blue surface of a little lake. The formation of the nearest hills is most fantastic; first of all a series of gentle slopes, sparsely covered with trees and shrubs, swell outward to grasp the plain; this is interrupted by a narrow band of strata, acting as base to a perpendicular wall of rock, divided vertically by great rows of flutes capped with mounds of verdure. On the opposite side of the plain, a line of mountains thinly set with trees rises toward a lofty cliff, all but meeting the tremendous wall of ruddy rock, curiously scooped and seamed, which towers over Dasht-i-Arzhan. Looking down from here, the village seems a succession of brown ledges sloping upward from plain to cliff. Just beyond it, a grove stands out against the rock in rounded masses of green.

A long descent brings us to the telegraph-station, where we halt an hour to rest and breakfast. In the meanwhile, clouds of mist begin to drift through the gap between the mountain ranges that hem in the valley. When we start again, the sky is overcast and threatening storm. We pass through the coppice, where deep grass grows profusely in the shade of splendid trees. Both hard at hand and across the plain, narrow waterfalls leap down the cliffs in white streams. From openings like fountains in the base of the sheer wall of ruddy rock beside us, water gushes forth and—after falling a few feet—runs through the grass in hurried rills of clear water. Storm-clouds have by this time burst through the mountain

gap, or rushed across their crests. Rain now descends hard and fast; it is unpleasantly cold, and not at all the weather one might expect in southern Persia on the first of May. The white chequers seen from the heights before reaching Dasht-i-Arzhan prove to be faintly golden fields of dried grain. The green portions of the plain are broken by bright yellow patches, where a flower like the buttercup grows. After skirting the mountains on two sides of the plateau, the road—when it has almost reached the furthest point—turns sharply to the right, ascending the precipitous mountain-side in long zigzags.

We climb through a forest of oak-trees, with boughs just tipped by small furry leaves of yellowish green. The earth is red but almost hid by yellow stones, among which the animals pick their way with great difficulty, the ascent being in itself steep enough to fatigue. As we mount, the plain spreads its wide surface below us, coloured with every tone of grey, green, and yellow, except where the lake reflects the mountain face in many-tinted lines. Far away higher uplands and distant mountains stand out clearly; near at hand a peak spotted with snow looms above the oaks. Through their boughs, I can see the pack animals toil and twist upward with a merry chiming of their bells. Curiously enough, whilst the rocks beside the path are almost red, the larger boulders a few feet further off are bluish grey. At first, small mauve flowers and a kind

of buttercup grew infrequently among the stones; as we near the summit, the ground is almost concealed by rows of a large flower called (I believe) in Persian, the Crown Imperial. Out of lush and clustered leaves, a tall brown stalk rises until terminated by a smaller whorl, from which three or four bell-shaped blossoms depend, bright red spotted with blackish purple near the stem. The rain has ceased and the sky begins to lighten; I can even see a small cliff beetling above the trees against a patch of intense blue. At last, after climbing fourteen hundred feet in forty-five minutes, we reach the top—a depression in the crests seven thousand five hundred feet above sea level.

We are now about to descend the first of the celebrated *kutāls*, as the mountain walls between here and Bushīr are called. In a comparatively short distance the land drops nearly eight thousand feet from this point to the sea—not as might be expected, in a continuous slope, but in one of the strangest formations existing anywhere. The Persian plateau is reached by a flight of titanesque steps. A few miles back from the coast, the first range of mountains ascends precipitously to a level plain, beyond which another gigantic cliff arises; altogether there are four of these nearly perpendicular walls, separated each from the other by fertile terraces of varying widths, but none—I should think—over ten or fifteen miles. Persia—with its four stupendous terraces, their base

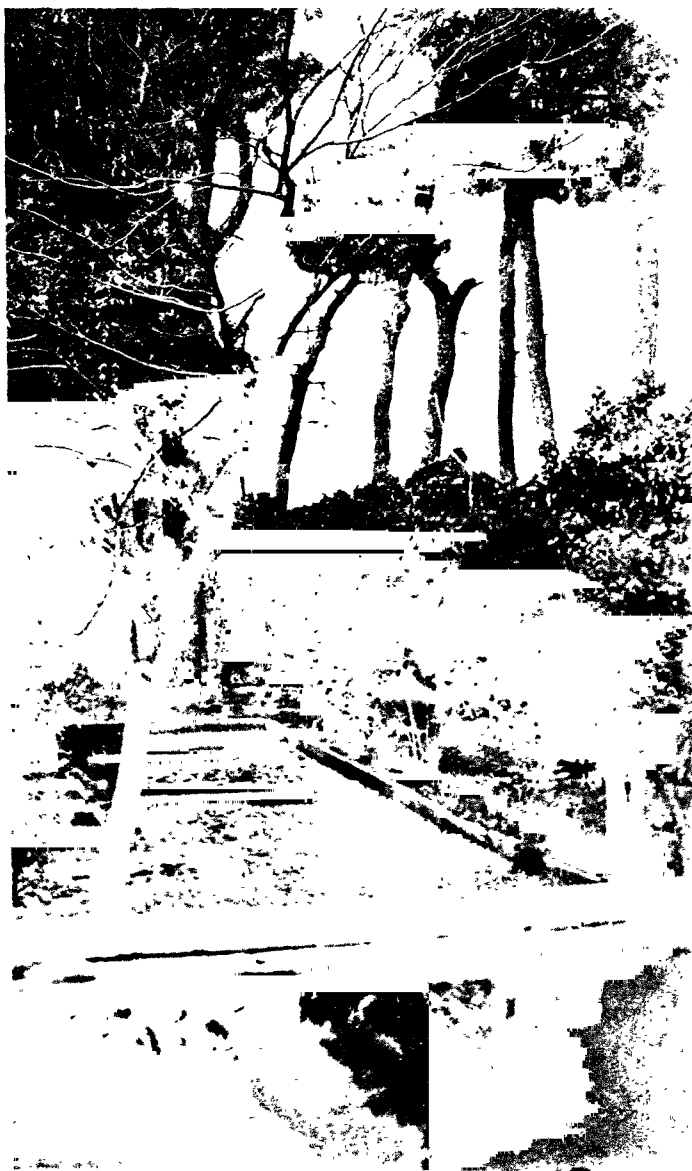
laved by the Persian Gulf, rising skyward to support a vast plateau—is really the immeasurable ruin of a hanging-garden, such as was once the glory of Nineveh or Babylon, only wrought by cosmic force in more than human proportion.

One of the most remarkable panoramas I have seen, now lies before us. Close at hand a pyramid of bare stone towers over all, sinking toward a long spur that just allows one glimpse of blue water very far away and several thousand feet below. In front of us the *kutāl* descends abruptly. As far as the eye can reach, it looks out across a sea of sharp ridges separated by strips of plain; their peculiarity is, that instead of rising vertically with more or less equal slopes as hills usually do, they seem to slant sharply toward the coast, like waves solidified when just on the point of toppling over, or like a house of cards about to fall. To convey the curious effect thus produced, is impossible. The nearest range is covered with small trees, between which the buff earth shows distinctly; but those farther off are barren and eroded in sweeping lines. We descend the precipitous mountain-side in the glare of a now blazing sun. The small portions of ground not covered by stones, are dry and almost without a blade of green. Occasionally a little brook murmurs among the boulders. Even the trees are more thinly scattered than on the other slope, the whole character of the scenery being more arid and southern.

At last we discover Miān Kutāl (Half-way



A Lateral Alley, Bāgh-i-Iram, Shirāz



Bâgh-i-Iram, Shirâz

Kutāl) far below us—a ruinous caravanserai half-way up the *kutāl* on the flat top of a hill-shoulder. After winding between large boulders, where springs gush out and then leap down the slope, we reach the more than usually unpleasant caravanserai.

Sunset on the *kutāl*. Behind me is the perpendicular mountain we descended at noon, dotted with trees, but none the less in general effect a wall of buff turning to rose. A short distance in front of me, the hill suddenly drops over a thousand feet down to a valley, where the grey line of a river-bed meanders through scattered trees. On its further side a range of rock slants away, its crest sharply waved, and its steep slope ribbed with long flutes. To the right the valley widens until closed by mountains of darkest violet. Westward the sky is a blaze of orange fading into pale green, and then rising in tones of ever deeper blue toward the zenith, where the moon's first crescent floats, chilly white. To the east across bare ridges, a cloud-bank flushes rose. The chirp of crickets fills the air; from the hillside behind me, a cuckoo's solemn chime rings out. The light is dying. Eastward the clouds have faded, and are now all but lost in the greenish sky. In the west, the orange glow has paled and spread out in a faintly yellow luminosity, melting into tremulous expanses of mauve, through which the first stars begin to glimmer. Overhead the now glittering moon appears translucent. A goat,

followed by her kid, strolls along the caravanseraï roof, where *gendarmes* have also gathered. A pool of water in the valley far below reflects the last rays, glowing like fire; near it two or three real fires begin to spangle the dark green shadows with spots of gold. On the hill-crest high above me, an inexplicable flame stands out against the dying sky; can it be a brigand camp? Anything is possible at twilight near a ruined caravanseraï high on a Persian hillside; but the hour is too tranquil to heed or care for aught, as peace and dreams open eburnean gates.

May 2nd

Day is breaking when we leave before five o'clock. The steepest of paths leads down the *kutāl* we half descended yesterday, among boulders and loose stones, which make the mules' work very difficult. Oaks grow on all sides, but far apart in ground entirely covered with rocks. Flaming clouds float across the sky, as the light loses its early pallor and turns live gold. We soon reach the level—fifteen hundred feet below Miān Kutāl—and find ourselves in a fertile valley. Oaks are frequent, and fields of grain still sparkling with dew cover the earth. Occasionally we pass white fields of opium-poppies, pale and dreamy. On all sides are high hills sparsely covered with trees, above which the sun has just begun to pour glowing rays that fill the valley with golden haze.

The road now turns down a gorge to the left. After a little, I can see a distant ridge crossing the narrow valley-mouth, and beyond that a plain with one end of a blue lake many hundred feet below. Knowing that the Kutāl-i-Dukhtar (the Daughter's Pass) lies between us and Kazarūn, I suppose that we must climb this ridge and then descend. Our path now slopes downward around a shoulder, looping back upon itself, and overhanging the plain. This constant gazing down immeasurable heights, makes one feel as though standing on the balconies of the world, looking out across space. At this spot I realise that the famous *kutāl* must be the side of the mountain upon whose top we now are, but cannot imagine how we are to descend. A donkey's carcass in a state of liquid putrefaction lies among the stones a few feet off the road, emitting so intolerable a stench we are almost sickened.

A few hundred yards more, and the manner of our descent at last becomes clear. The lofty hill over whose sharp edge I am peering, is a sort of headland at the extremity of a vast semicircle of rufous and almost perpendicular cliffs. On the vertical face of a rocky wall seven hundred feet high, a pathway has been cut, just wide enough for two mules to pass with their loads, and paved with cobble-stones between which large holes have been worn. A continuous slope being of course impossible, it winds up in a series of short but very steep zigzags, one over the other—just

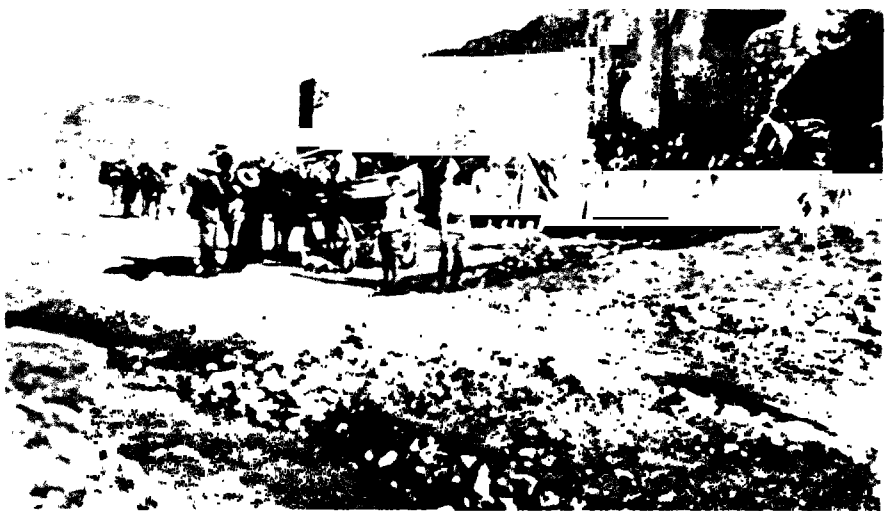
as a rude stairway might ascend a terrace front of gigantic proportions. Caravan after caravan of diminutive donkeys, carrying burdens larger than themselves, is toiling painfully upward. As we start down, the cries of muleteers float up incessantly, re-echoing from the cliffs. Here we are in shade, but in front of us everything is yellow with sun-flood. This incredible staircase, thronged with weary animals, and echoing with cries from top to bottom of its dizzy height, is as fantastic a sight as man could imagine.

We have gone only a few feet, when Saïd calls to Mrs. D. and me to take a rough path around some rocks, in order to avoid the sight of more carrion; but it cannot be escaped. It is another tiny donkey, that must have dropped head foremost on the way down; for its head and neck are doubled under, and completely hidden by the body. A child could have lifted the poor creature into a less tortured posture, but there the Persians left it to agonise. There are moments when the sight of all this suffering and indifference fills me with such rage and disgust, I "see red." At last we reach the bottom, and start down a gentle but still stony declivity. On the *kutāl* wild carnations grew; here among the roadside-boulders there are fuzzy bushes with small flowers, white and bell-shaped, with tiny lavender weeds actually entangled in the lower branches.

We have now reached the level, and, after rounding the last spur of the great hemicycle of



Mills Outside Shirāz



Chinar-i-Rahdār
The crowd watching our caravan start for Bushir



One of Our Escort, 'Ali Khân, Descending a Kutál



View from a Kutál Looking Down on the Caravanseraï of Miân Kutál

cliffs, find ourselves in the cultivated plain of Kazarūn. A large tablet is cut in the rock, but appears modern and without interest. To the left a lake, silvery blue and dotted with a few islets without vegetation, stretches away until lost to sight around a bend in the mountains. Across the valley is another range of hills, bare and seamed. Turning sharply to the right, we move westward across a stone causeway in the middle of a marshy pool full of fish; on either hand, tall thick clumps of sedge are hung with the white trumpets of morning-glory vines. The road now passes between high grain covering all the valley-floor, except where interrupted by fields of very tall opium-poppies. To my disgust, I find that Kazarūn is still two *farsakhs* away.

As this valley has recently been the site of much fighting, and is still the haunt of brigands, our captain divides his ten men into two columns, which he heads rifle in hand, as they ride single file through the grain on either side of the road,—rather a picturesque sight. As we approach Kazarūn, there are orchards of pomegranate trees, covered with small trumpets of the brightest vermillion. Along the roadside runs a rude attempt at fences (the first I have seen in Persia) made of thorn bushes.

The poppy fields are now more numerous, and the plants so tall they reach the shoulders of the men engaged in scraping the huge seed-capsules to let the opium exude. Women and girls—half

naked under their dust-coloured rags—are at work among the golden grain. A grove of date-palms is now in sight, one of the gardens for which this place is famed; it is a walled enclosure apparently solid with verdure, out of which the long trunks and clustered leaves of the palms emerge.

The town is visible at last,—low mud houses interspersed with date trees. The gardens are scattered over the plain in green squares. As we ride through the streets, we pass the ruins of house after house, blown up by *gendarmes* after the attack in which their Swedish commandant was killed. Poor people! first the brigands pillage them, then retire, leaving the more or less innocent to be punished for the misdeeds of others. Here there is a pleasant but fortified telegraph-station, filled with little holes where attacking bullets have recently struck. As there is only one vacant room, Major T.—the Swedish officer in command of the *gendarmes*—very kindly offers to put me up. Were it not for the kindness which every European shows to travellers in Persia, their lot would be intolerable. The telegraph-inspector and the operator have an excellent luncheon ready and do everything to make Kazarūn agreeable. In Major T.'s house, there is a boy of eight or nine years, recovering from a gun-shot wound received some months ago, while bringing the *gendarmes* a message. I am eager to visit the famous bas-reliefs at Shāpūr, a few miles across the plain; but the British Consul at Shīrāz strongly

opposed my attempting it, and now the Major tells me that if I insist on doing so, he will not answer for our safety, even with the *gendarmes* whom he has ordered to reinforce our escort to-morrow. Only last week nine of his men were killed here in a fight with brigands. As I am travelling with a lady, Shāpūr must perforce remain unvisited.

May 3rd

At half-past three I am waked by the bells of our mules, entering the court to take their loads. When dressed I walk to the telegraph-station to breakfast with Mrs. D. The guards had to be warned last evening of my coming, as they have orders to fire at the slightest sound during the night. It is broad day when we start, with four extra *gendarmes* as well as our usual escort of soldiers. The masses of foliage which seem to burst from the garden-walls we pass, are jewel-like in the intensity and richness of their greens. We continue down the valley, which here differs in no respect from the upper end. Our escort divides into groups, riding off through the fields in every direction to reconnoitre. Major T. soon overtakes us, on his way to inspect the *gendarmerie* posts, which are here quite close to one another. That they can protect the road is obvious; but what a few armed foot-soldiers can do to subdue large bands of mounted robbers, I cannot see.

I have been told that last week the *gendarmes* surrounded the famous chief who has caused so much trouble, and might have captured him, had they not been too busy looting. They are also said to be such liars and cowards that, unless they produce the bodies (which as yet they have not done), their officers cannot believe them when they report nocturnal attacks repulsed with several men killed, but carried off by the remaining brigands.

We are now nearing the valley-end, where there is an unusually large fort. The stench of carrion grows stronger every minute, until, on reaching the fort, the cause becomes evident: the skinned carcasses of two camels are lying, bloody and rotten, not two hundred yards from the gate; yet the *gendarmes* have made no attempt to remove them. The walls in this case do show recent traces of bullets. On a hill-crest dominating the valley, a little flag attracts attention to a sentinel's tent. Here we bid good-bye to the courteous and very interesting Swedish officer, who must sometimes wonder what he and his comrades can accomplish in this impossible country, where they are shot down, while their work disappears like sand-castles before waves.

After leaving the plains of Kazarūn by a lateral valley, the road soon enters the Tang-i-Turkān—an extremely narrow gorge winding between high walls of blackened rock, to which patches of reddish earth adhere, offering root-hold to many



Women Travelling in Kajāwas

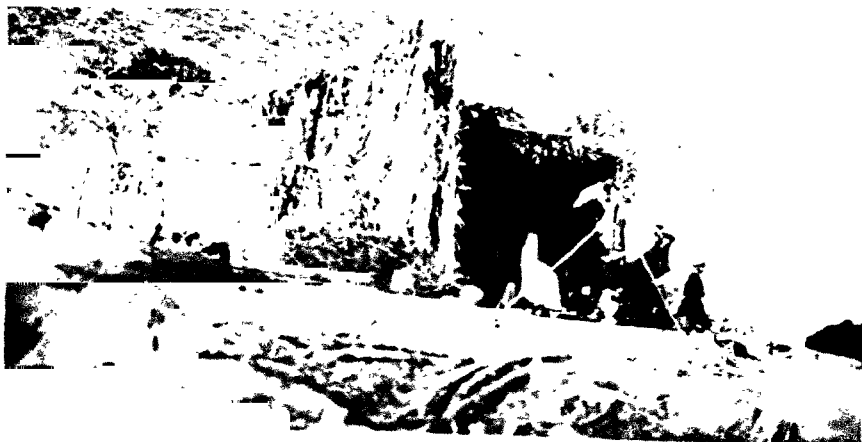


Our Caravan and Escort Passing a Gendarmerie Post near Kazarūn
 Travel in this district is still dangerous and a sentinel is on watch at every post of
 gendarmes



The Kutāl-i-Mihr

The zig-zag line in the centre is the path down the precipitous cliff. Thus the situation makes it impossible to take a photograph of any of the Kutals which shall give an idea of their peculiarities



A Woman Churning on the Road to Kahna Takht:

shrubs. In some places the distance from side to side is so small, it would almost be possible to touch both of them with outstretched arms. The heat in this defile is unpleasant. The track ascends steadily, twisting in and out among boulders and crevices, which render the animals' progress very difficult. Then, after sinking again, the gorge widens as we emerge on a plain, with Kamarij nestling under the hills on the further side. This valley is fertile but smaller than that of Kazarūn, and entirely girdled by blackish purple mountains, spotted with brown or rose-grey earth.

When we reach the village, the lodgings are as usual filthy and in ruin. My room is on a court filled with noisy men, women, and babies, not to mention my omnipresent enemies—the cats. Thanks to the servants and provisions which Mrs. B. sent with us from Shīrāz, we have many comforts; but eating is difficult when, from the table, there is a clear view of a horse's bloated carcass, with a lean white dog tearing flesh from its bleeding ribs; and the room is alive with flies that have just been walking over filth and carrion. The privations of rough camping would be luxurious, compared with the horror of this semi-civilised country, where one lodges in squalor among dung and putrefaction. . . .

Night and feeble moonlight. In one corner of the courtyard a woman is cooking something in a pot, stirring it with one hand, and with the other

holding a burning brand to give her light. A man squats before a large coffer, while a woman emerges from a dark room, carrying a lighted candle in either hand—her arms held out from her sides with the pose of a tragic actress. On a low platform, in the opposite corner near a fire of small branches, a child lies on a rug beside its mother, wailing for the breast. The woman is seated on the ground, with a long veil hanging from her head, outlined against the flame, nursing her child like a madonna. Only a cricket is to be heard, and—from behind a partition—the breathing of cows and the munching of mules. Moon and firelight mingle in a curious glow, warm but pale.

May 4th

At a quarter before three in the morning, the half-moon has set, and there is no sign of dawn. Across the unlighted sky a falling star has just shot through the constellations, leaving a golden trail. When the caravan is ready, there is just light enough to find our way dimly between the grain fields, as the darkness recedes and the stars go out. We wind around, then up the hills which enclose the valley, finding ourselves at the entrance to the Kutāl-i-Kamarij before the sun has risen, but just when full day has come.

This is reputed the most difficult *kutāl* in all Persia, and has long excited my curiosity. At first the track descends a narrow defile, where a

few oleander bushes with pink blossoms, which grow beside a clear rivulet, are the only living things in sight; everything else is bare and dry like ancient bones. The mules pick their way with difficulty through the crevices between boulders. There are some sharp descents in the path, but no signs of the precipices and other perils of which I read. Just as this thought begins to perplex, the gorge suddenly widens, revealing the real *kutāl*. At this point the two sides of the valley spread apart, while what has heretofore been the bed of the stream stops short at the edge of a slanting cliff, down which the water is precipitated, among green stains and small shrubs, to another valley over twelve hundred feet below. A more startling view I have never seen.

Down the almost vertical face of the mountain, a narrow path descending in short loops, has been worn and built. At times it twists down the side of the cliff, at others passes out onto buttress-like projections, where it resembles the rude termination of a spiral staircase. Standing a few feet to one side of the trail, I find myself on the edge of the chasm, looking straight down incalculable heights to the foaming river in the valley far below. Opposite, but very close, towers a bare pointed peak, grey-blue and—like all the colours in sight—metallic as though produced by the action of acid. Centuries of water rushing down its flanks, have hollowed out a series of curved channels separated by long ribs, in whose sharp

edges the different layers are clearly visible. These ribs sweep from the pointed summit down to the base like vast sinews, spreading out as they descend. They seem immutably to support the mountain, conveying a sense of organic force only perceptible in nature's grandest work. The nobility of these sweeping lines a master's drawing might faintly convey, but words cannot even suggest it. Their effect (one never found in human work) deserves the term sublime, since with beauty it mingles strangeness and awe. The valley which lies so far below, between this mountain and the cliff on whose side I am standing, is no more than a hemicycle in the side of a wider one, bounded by a low range, slate-coloured and sharply inclined coastward. Beyond it rises a tawny ridge, over which the flat top of a distant mountain just shows in deep misty blue. The light is already clear, but the colours cold and dead, since the sun-rays have not yet plunged across the peaks into the shaded valley above which we seem suspended. Of vegetation there are but few signs; of life and sound—none. Nothing to be seen but the majestic forms wrought by cosmic evolution. Standing on this cliff edge, looking out over space toward lifeless summits in the chill light of early dawn,—awe steals over me as though I had slipped unawares into the precincts of some supersensual fane.

The mules have started down, and as we follow on foot (riding is too dangerous) I can see them

wind down after our soldiers, who are leading their horses. At times the path worn through the rocks, is so narrow two animals could not possibly pass. As we clamber down—jumping from stone to stone—it turns gradually, entering the main valley. Over the nearer chains we catch glimpses of higher summits, far distant and rosy with the sun-rays they have been the first to catch. Suddenly a ragged Kāshghar (a nomad tribe), who has overtaken us and passed ahead, begins to gesticulate violently and utter piercing screams in which one word frequently recurs. Our dapper captain rushes up to him, then shouts down to his men—almost out of sight among the rocks below. He tells us that the man is making an outcry because one of our escort has stolen a cone of sugar from him. In a few moments a soldier climbs up to return his comrade's booty, but the incident is not ended. When we reach the bottom of our cliff-cut stairway, without accident or loss of luggage over precipices, the soldiers are waiting beside their horses in a narrow gully, through which there is just room to pass beside the stream. The culprit having already been laid on a rock, the officer and one of his men proceed to thrash him with riding whips. They lay on the blows with all their might, while the man screams and wriggles; as he has all his clothes, including a thick overcoat, he cannot really feel much pain. A few months ago, I should have thought it impossible to see a man flogged with-

out attempting to stop it. To-day I feel no sympathy, only approval of his punishment and regret that it should be so light. These wretched soldiers do not steal from the rich—driven perhaps by necessity—so much as from starving peasants, from whom they take by force whatever they chance to wish. Being impervious to reproofs or example, only pain can deter them.

After this little incident, we continue down the now slightly descending valley. Behind us, the slaty-blue chains of rock have closed in, hiding the gorge we left so far above us, hiding even that wonderful ribbed mountain. They are still in shade, but—to the left—sun lies on the second rosy yellow ranges, slowly moving down their flanks, driving shadows before it. We are again changing direction, moving down a wider gorge intersected by thin walls of rock, through which the stream has cut openings just wide enough to let us pass. The inevitable body of a poor donkey lies half in the water, as we enter one of these cliffs. For some minutes the sound of rushing water has steadily grown louder; of a sudden we come out on the high bank of a wide but shallow stream, dashing over hidden rocks in little waves that fill the air with their babble. The river sweeps away in a wide semicircle, which we follow among boulders high up on a hillside overhanging the water. In a cove where the hills recede, a small village and a *gendarmerie* post lie in the morning sun, misty with smoke. In front of a

wattled shed close to the road, a woman is making butter in a curiously primitive churn. From a horizontal stick, supported at either end by crossed poles, a skin sewed into a rude sack is hung. This is filled with milk, and swings backwards and forwards, until butter forms. A similar device was probably employed in Achæmenian times, surviving to this day but little changed.

We soon leave the river by an incline to the left, from whose summit another plain is visible, spreading across to another *kutāl*. It is dotted with green squares—groves of date palms clustering round a few clay houses. We are now near the bottom of Persia's world-wall, where fertile valleys lie like terraces between parallel lines of mountains, sloping south-eastward as far as India. It seems afternoon, but is only a half after eight o'clock when we reach the telegraph rest-house at Konar Takhtī, where we are to wait until mid-day before starting for Dalakī. The weather is surprisingly cool for the place and time of year, and the telegraph-compound a pleasant spot, its few acacias musical with twittering birds. It would be altogether comfortable were it not for innumerable flies, always loathsome, but in a land of disease and carrion doubly so.

At half past one we start again; fortunately a strong breeze pleasantly tempers the heat. Our way leads across the narrow valley toward the hills. On either side of us are fields of ripe grain, where large insects—not locusts—can be seen clinging

to the golden stalks as they sway back and forth. Straw-coloured grasshoppers, as big as humming birds, jump across the road or whizz through the air. Before long we mount a little crest, and then descend to a gravelly valley. I shall never grow used to the surprises these *kutāls* reserve for travellers. There is nothing about this path in any way different from a thousand other hillsides; I am thinking what tremendous imagination (to put it politely) Loti and other travellers must have used in their description of the ascent, when the valley plays the old trick of stopping short at the brink of a precipice. Passing round a heap of boulders, I discover a vast ravine, lying hundreds and hundreds of feet below at the base of a perpendicular wall of rock, on whose edge we are perched. This is the real Kutāl-i-Malu—the Hare's or the Cursed Pass—to which the little valley we have just descended was merely an approach.

Two parallel ranges of high mountains, entirely without vegetation, enclose the valley into which I am peering, their summits on a level with my feet. Egress from it appears barred by another line of mountains crossing its further end;—peaked masses of olive-green, in places almost black, below which are foot-hills wrought and wrinkled in fantastic shapes, whose variety never ceases to interest. These views—standing on precipice edges—looking over wide spaces or down dizzy distances into wild ravines, exhilarate as nothing



The Peaks above the Dalâki River near the Kutâl-i-Mîhr



The Dalāki River near the Kutāl-i-Mihr



A Sentinel on the Roof of a Gendarmerie Post Guarding a Bridge over the Dalāki River

else can do. We now start down the *kutāl* on foot, following the mules, who take each step very slowly after deliberately searching with one leg for foothold. The path twists back and forth to make descent possible, over painful stones between high piles of rock. Half-way down it is continued by a cork-screw stairway, built with parapets and paved with cobbles. These the *chār-wādārs* evidently think too slippery for their animals, since they lead them over a steep path on the opposite side of the gully down which we are climbing. The bottom has now been reached; it has been a toilsome and certainly most precipitous descent, but has not seemed very remarkable. I am wondering why celebrated travellers have made such a pother about it, when I happen to stop and look back; then I realise what an impression this *kutāl* must make on persons moving up toward it. The valley appears without issue, absolutely sealed by a perpendicular wall of tawny rock tracing a jagged line across the bright blue sky. Just as Loti says, there seems to be no possible means of ascent; even when the track we have just descended is visible, it looks like nothing more than a jagged line traced on a sheer mountain-side, up which no living thing could possibly climb. Such a view might easily alarm, as well as astonish, ascending travellers.

Advancing along a nearly level track, the mountains which seemed to bar our egress, prove to be on the opposite side of a much wider valley, situ-

ated at right angles to the one we are now passing through. The road turns insensibly, leading out into the broader valley, which is cleft in the centre by a deep gorge with perpendicular walls. At the bottom, several hundred feet below the ledge where our path skirts the chasm verge, the Dalakī River rushes by, foaming like liquid aquamarine. Contrasting strongly with the deep velvet green of the mountains in shade across the valley, two eroded and very jagged peaks rise to the left in full sunlight, dominating the scene with their barren yellow pyramids of rock and earth, which in more ravaged portions are rose-coloured; for in Persia at certain hours every part of the landscape seems tinged with pink. It is difficult to convey the curious impression produced on looking, first down the chasm to the swirling stream, then up to the bright bare peaks, which, in sun so far above, loom in the sky.

From this point the path twists along, now nearer, now further from the edge of the ravine, descending all the while, until, on reaching the river level, it passes along a very narrow ledge between the hills and the stream. As the water is in these parts impregnated with sulphur, I had supposed the river to be the cause of an evil stench growing steadily stronger; but the far decayed body of another donkey soon proves to be its origin. A fine bridge—probably built under Shāh ‘Abbās, since everything solid seems to date from his reign—spans the river, its approach

guarded by partly ruined fortifications. On top of the tower an armed *gendarme* is as usual posted beside the flag, watching the road. These fortified posts, with their sentinel outlined against the sky, give the country a peculiar mediæval air, reminding one how unsettled it really is. A short way beyond the bridge, a clear brook descends directly from hills without any signs of habitation; so its water seems safe to drink. It is the first draught of unboiled water I have had in four months, and tastes more delicious than any wine. A few moments later the road quits the river-bank, and to my great surprise enters a gorge, which the setting sun has left entirely in shade. I had understood that there were no more passes, and expected to follow the stream out into coast-lands. We climb and climb, each rise showing our weary eyes a further ascent instead of the plain. Just when there seems to be no end to these barren rocks, we suddenly emerge from the ravine, with a boundless expanse of level green lying far below us, dotted with palms growing beside the river we left behind us in the valley. As we descend, the sun is just touching the horizon toward which the plain stretches like a solid sea of emerald.

It is neither a beautiful nor a striking view, but few scenes have ever pleased me more, since it tells me that my very disappointing journey through Persia is nearly ended, and escape across the not far distant gulf at last possible. Rounding

a mountain spur, Dalakī comes into sight, nestling at the foot of the hills in a grove of spreading palm-trees. A horrid stench of sulphur grows stronger the nearer we approach. When we arrive, moonlight has all but vanquished the last rays of sun. The lodging-place is very bad indeed, with only one room at all possible. Giving orders that the luggage shall not be unloaded until my return, I start out to see if there is nothing to be had at the *gendarmerie*. I discover a decent room, but on going back to have my kit brought over, find that the *chār-wādārs* have dropped everything in the middle of a court filled with manure. Unless I wish to wait an hour, while it is being reloaded, there is nothing to do but take possession of a small cavern opening on a little terrace two feet above the unspeakable courtyard. Thrashing the muleteers is only an act of justice, but does not help matters. The air is stifling and filled with mosquitoes; the stench of sulphur enough to asphyxiate. Seated on the end of a valise, sweltering on the moon-lit terrace, as I watch Saïd struggle with the luggage pitched in hopeless confusion in the midst of dirt and dung; I try to take a swallow of what ought to be wine and water, and get a nauseating mouthful of warm cooking grease from a bottle the cook has had the impudence to place in my own saddle-bag. Only a sense of humour stands between me and desperation. How my travelling companion, Mrs. D., can stand the hardships and annoy-

ances of such a journey with equanimity, I can admire but hardly understand. Personally, it seems to me as though the few hours separating me from the boat to India were more than I could bear.

May 5th

Even with wide-open doors, my room was suffocating last night, and mosquitoes devoured what parts fleas had spared the night before. A strange noise on the floor aroused me; investigation by candle-light discovered on the ceiling, near the head of my bed, a swallow's nest from which droppings fell regularly. After three or four hours of harassed sleep, I rose at half-past two, but it was past four o'clock when we got under way. Now as we crawl along the road to Borasjān, the overpowering stench of sulphur nauseates me. From time to time, we are forced to ford pools of oily black water streaked with green. As the sun rises, the heat becomes unpleasant. The road goes up and down ugly undulations in an interminable plain of bare yellowish grey earth. How hateful and wearisome it is! This wretched country shows itself in its most unlovely aspect these last days. Minutes drag along like hours; heat and weariness are really distressing. At last Borasjān comes into sight among its date-palms. We are to rest here and then push forward to Bushīr by night, avoiding

the heat. The kindly English telegraph-operator has prepared an excellent luncheon, and does everything to make us comfortable. What would become of travellers without these British Samaritans?

It is past eight o'clock and very bright—although the moon is only half grown—when we leave for Shif, where we are to take a boat across the bay to Bushīr. We have decided to let our soldiers from Shīrāz go directly to Bushīr, as accompanying us to Shif would mean many extra miles for their weary horses; and are now escorted by five *gendarmes* whose faces I cannot clearly distinguish in this vague light. It is warm, but not unpleasantly so, and the moon-flood is mellow across the plain. As we ride out of the village, the air resounds with a confused noise like human voices accompanied by rude cymbals. It comes from the walled palm gardens which line the road; so I suppose it to be discordant music at some moonlight festival. It appears that, in every garden, donkeys are drawing the water to fill the irrigating channels and moisten the sun-parched earth; the noise we hear is the unimaginable creaking and squeaking of the apparatus which pulls the buckets up the deep wells. It would be difficult to find anything stranger than these harshly festive sounds reaching our ears from every direction, as we ride between the clay walls in the brilliance of the moon.

When the village has been left behind, I can

just perceive an earthy plain stretching vaguely away without bounds—at rare intervals dotted with mud villages and a few date-palms. In this dim light where only form and no colour can be distinguished, these trees really do look like immense feather-dusters. I feel as though we must be riding through one of those extraordinary countries where objects of utility acquire life; lands like the one which in *Davy and the Goblin* so charmed my childhood, as to seem to this day a part of my own experience. If I am perhaps suffering from hallucinations to-night, it is not surprising. Even by charitable moonlight, I can make out the utter monotony of the featureless level—either mud or baked clay according to season—which illimitably surrounds us. The sight of it irritates, even more than it wearies, the nerves; to add to my misery, drowsiness has begun to seize me. At Borasjān thousands of flies prevented me from so much as closing my eyes, and last night fleas, mosquitoes, heat, and swallows, accorded me only a few hours' doze. Now an irresistible sleepiness overpowers me like pain. Do what I will, my head drops and—for a few moments—I move along swaying from side to side, until a sudden lurch rouses me just in time to seize the pommel and keep from falling. In the hope of really waking myself, I get off and walk; even this is useless, since I tramp along in a kind of trance, stumbling over the ruts formed by dried mule-prints. The only thing which for

a few seconds shakes off this painful torpor, is my mule's behaviour. She must be possessed by forty devils to-night; refusing to be led, she drags behind me at the bridle-end, then shies outrageously whenever I try to mount. Whether swaying in the saddle, or marching on bruised and weary feet, time crawls with a slowness that seems an added torment. After what appears to be an endless space of time, I take out my watch only to find that just ten minutes have elapsed since I last looked; there are hours, and still more hours of travel ahead of us. The Great Bear descends the sky, turning over as it circles round the polar star; its progress, only perceptible in relation to fixed stars, gives an irritating measure of how time seems forever halted.

At midnight we stop to rest and eat. Lying on the baked earth in the ghostly light, with nothing visible but the dark silhouette of our animals in a void expanse; I feel outside the world in some dim gehenna. After a few agonised moments, spent on my back trying to keep my eyes from closing, we move on. The *yābū's* great bell booms and jangles about the tinkling mule-bells. Boom, crash! Boom, crash! it beats in on my brain. There is no longer any hope of ending this horrible journey; time must have ceased. Fatigue and perhaps a touch of fever have really bred hallucinations, for nightmares dance before me even with open eyes. The moon descends the sky among nacreous veils swaying strangely; or



The Dock at Bushir. Battered Luggage, and Said in Despair



A Pleasant Persian Punishment: Yaching

This is not a rude statue, but a human being put to death by torture near Qum. A man who had stolen two cucumbers was bound with cords and a wall of mud bricks built around him, after which the space between the wall and his body was filled with liquid lime. As the poor creature was still alive at the end of six hours, the corporal shot him through the head. The corporal of gendarmes, responsible for this atrocity, is indicated by the cross at his feet.

when my eyelids suddenly unclosed, I see fading outlines of mountain peaks traced in crimson on the grey void before me. Our own animals and men move before, behind, or beside me, like visions in the dim circles of Dante's Hell. Every nerve and muscle aches, and I am almost nauseated by the uncontrollable rocking of my drowsy head. I am actually living one of those tortured dreams which sometimes makes sleep horrible.

The Great Bear now lies directly under the North Star, and the moon has almost sunk to the vague dimness marking the horizon. Every minute its light lessens, growing greyer and more ghastly; finally its wan fragment disappears in the formless dark. For a little we move along in a mere ghost of light, just able to see one another and the track before us. The *gendarmes* pass back and forth beside us like phantoms, as the light becomes fainter and still more faint. Then darkness closes around us—almost a relief. Soon I begin to look eastward eagerly, hoping to discern the pallor of "false dawn"; but the dim starry sky obstinately remains without change. This slow march through immeasurable night, seems an eternal torment. When all hope has long been dead, a greyness begins to creep along the eastern horizon, and slowly mounts the sky. Then a white luminosity fills all the heavens eastward, giving just enough light to see where we are: a level rutty plain of dried mud, bounded by a low chain of dirty brown hills, under a sky absolutely

lifeless except for a misty glow in the east. A more unlovely scene never met the strained gaze of aching travellers.

Still no sign of Shif as the light increases, always without life or colour—a mere ghost of daybreak. At last, over a slight eminence I can descry a towered caravanserai on the sand beside a grey sea. I dare not believe it to be our destination, but before long we ride up and dismount among bales of merchandise piled outside the walls. A sail-boat is waiting at anchor to carry us to Bushīr. After the mules have been unloaded, and the luggage carried to the boat on men's backs, we ride out through the water and climb aboard. At first a feeble wind just fills the slanted sail; but before long the men are obliged to row with long oars of primitive shape. As the sun is now up and beginning to burn, a small sail is rigged across the stern to screen us. Lying here, I do not care what may happen, now that I have reached the sea and can escape from the country which for so many years I dreamed of visiting.

Bushīr is in sight—a low line of not untidy houses on a rounded headland. Clambering onto the dock, amid a crowd of onlookers, I regretfully bid farewell to my courageous fellow-traveller who is to visit friends. Then, after seeing my kit loaded on a string of tiny donkeys, I get into a real carriage, and drive seven miles through sandy country, in sight of the

vividly blue-green sea, to the British Residency at Sabzābād.

May 7th

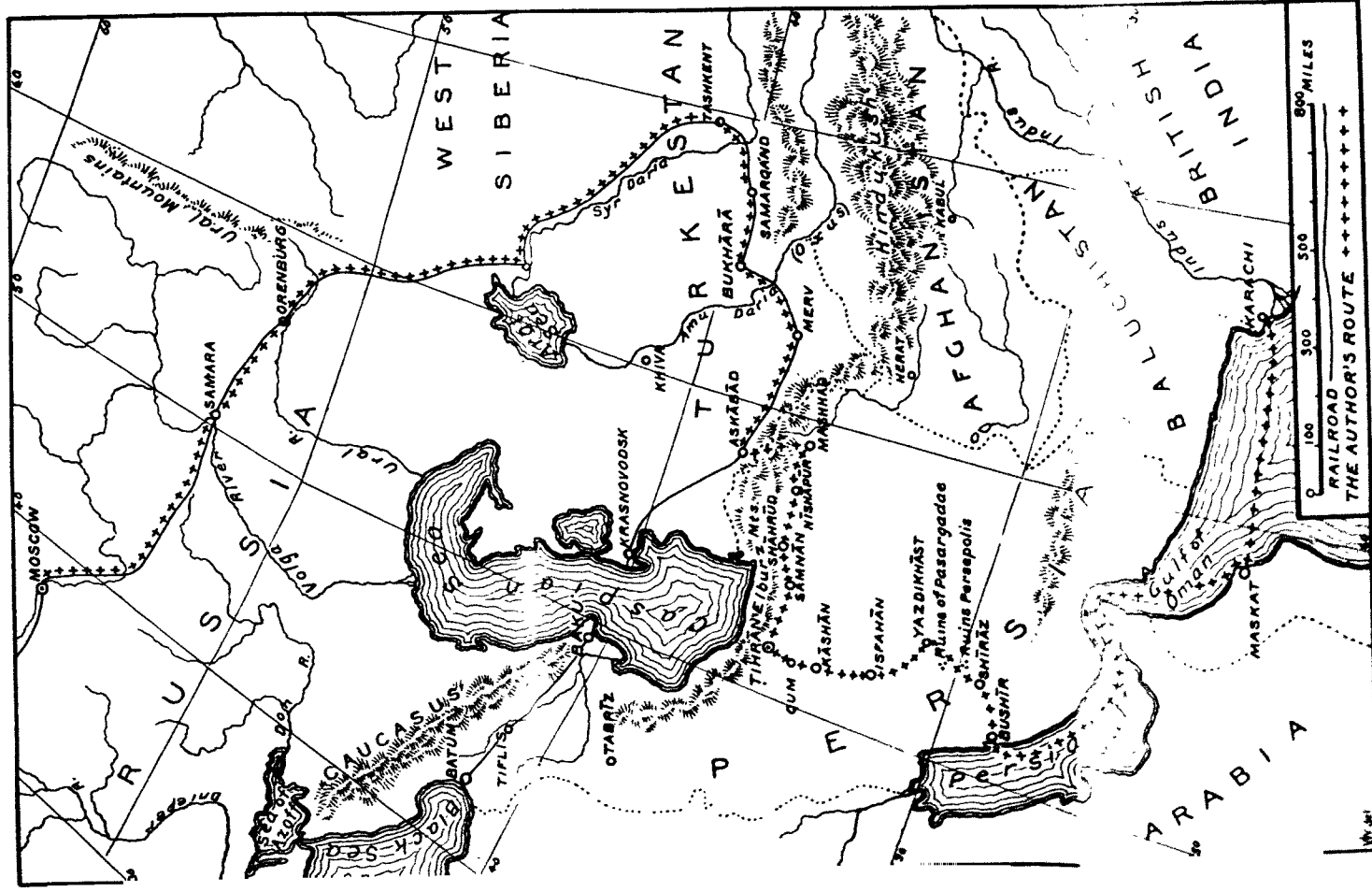
The Residency is a huge building with large high-ceilinged rooms behind a very deep veranda, which always keeps them in shade. It is filled with well-trained Indian servants, whose quiet ways and spotless white clothes seem miraculous after inefficient Persians in frock-coats. It is situated in a sandy plain (now brown, but earlier in the year green with crops) dotted with palms and a feathery green tree—close to the deep turquoise waters of the Persian Gulf. After my long and distasteful journey, it is a haven of refuge, which pleasant company, interesting conversation, and unlimited hospitality, enhance. The Resident's wife is a splendid example of the energy and unconscious courage which make Englishwomen in far parts one of the finest types of womanhood to be met with anywhere. Gently born and often none too robust, without the stimulus of official work, separated from their children, in the midst of impossible climates and conditions those at home cannot even conceive; they maintain an unflinching courage and interest in life, quite beyond praise. Men and women alike, these British exiles, their activities often neglected or misjudged by Government, are the flower of their race, with a devotion to duty and

a high standard of living that inspire all who come in contact with them.

May 10th

The mail-steamer for Karachi has arrived, and I am to board her this evening to avoid a midnight departure. Leaving my best wishes with those who have made my last days in Persia memorable, I start for Bushīr at sundown. A scarlet globe, much flattened, is just dipping in the sea; the sky is aflame with gold and bronze that seem to suffuse the air, making me feel as though moving through a haze of gold. When the carriage reaches the wharf, my seven donkeys—all white except one—have trotted up to the sail-boat and dropped their burdens. The boatmen push off, poling through shallow water for a long distance. At last I am leaving Persia! The sun has set; near the horizon the sky is grey-green, but—after passing behind bright clouds—melts into pale lilac where one star hangs; then, above darker smoke-coloured clouds, deepens to vivid blue. The men have hoisted a sail that no wind fills, and are rowing with long oars strangely shaped. Night is gathering as we glide over the now breathless sea, across which the distant lights of the steamer have just begun to shine. Then the moon rises—a dull orange disk, trying to break through black clouds, and as yet casting no light on the dark oily water. It would be

pleasant to feel romantic—like Loti—on leaving Persia, and write rosy dithyrambs about cities of “light and death” bathed in the diaphanous atmosphere of the distant uplands; but candour forces me to admit that my sensations are most unromantic. The foreground of my consciousness is filled by the slowness of our progress through hot and stupefying vapour, the rest by a vivid remembrance of discomfort and—what is worse—disappointment. So I take my last view of one more illusion, Persia—a country that has in many ways been worth the visit, but one that I hope heartily never to see again. Whenever in the future I think of it, among the memories of my three months’ journey, the chief place will always be occupied by the unfailing kindness and hospitality of English men and women, whom I had never seen before, but now feel honoured to call friends.



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